

## Resource Section

WITH MORE THAN 30  
LISTINGS FOR  
ADVOCACY, SUPPORT  
AND MORE



**Young Voices**  
4 Youth share their  
experiences



**Flightback**  
Experiences and  
advice on FII



**Family Decision  
Making Team**  
Not just support

# PAR MAGAZINE



## Welcome to PAR - Issue Two

Welcome to our second issue of Parents Advocacy and Rights Magazine!

Inside this issue we will hear from Flightback, an organisation set up by parents, for parents who have been falsely accused of FII, a very very rare form of medical child abuse. We are delighted that these brave parents have chosen to share their stories with us and raise awareness of this aspect of child protection which has been rapidly on the rise.

*"No matter what  
people tell you,  
words and ideas  
can change the  
world."*

*Robin Williams*

We will also hear from Julie Falconer at the Family decision making team, and hear about the work they do with children in care.

PAR is a group of parents and independent social workers who are motivated to influence change for the wellbeing of children and families. PAR stands for Parents Advocacy and Rights. PAR also means equal. Parents have a right to be treated as equals by professionals and others in the children's care and protection systems. PAR Magazine aims to provide a voice for families and those who work with them to promote the necessary changes to ensure we get it right for every family.

PAR was set up in 2016 by a group of parents and two independent social workers. The Scottish Association of Social Workers had invited David to speak at a conference in Edinburgh which was attended by both parents and social workers. Parents spoke about how they suffered from being shut out of decisions, their human rights breached, and isolated from being able to advocate for their children.

(We hope that you will join us. If you want to contribute to future issues, have a comment or resource to contribute please email:  
parentsadvocacyandrightsmag@gmail.com)

## *The Scottish Child Law Centre*



The Scottish Child Law Centre provides free legal advice and guidance on all law matters pertaining to children and young people.

They have dedicated solicitors that can answer questions and offer further training to organisations and individuals.

<http://www.sclc.org.uk>

# Content

## Young voices

How not to be a children's social worker	p5
The truth is out - Hear my cry	p6
Why I don't trust you	p7
A child like me	p8

## Advice and experiences of Parents

This was not my destiny	p10
The Verdict	p11
Mea Culpa	p13
A Grandfather's experience	p16

## Flightback

I wasn't prepared for the trauma it brought	p20
Sick child to falsely accused	p21
In my best interests	p22
The grief is never ending	p22
Broken	p23

## Professional section

Life Long Links - Family Decision Making Team	p25
Lifelong Links poem	p28
Assessing your social worker	p29
Getting the right legal support	p32

<b>Resources and contacts</b>	<b>p35</b>
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# Young Voices



In everything we do, in everything we hope to achieve, our children are our priority. This is their future that we are building, their lives we wish to build up. We are overjoyed that they have written in to PAR, such that we can share them.

Our four young voices in this issue are from three teen girls and one younger girl.

These girls' bold, fresh voices brought so much energy into my computer, I truly hope that everyone who reads them will find their spirit and determination equally as energising.

Well done Young Voice Authors, each and every one of you should be so proud.

## How not to be a children's social worker



How not to be a children's social worker  
by G-Pig

1. Invade my home uninvited. That makes me feel great.
2. Fish for compliments at every opportunity. You are the most important person in the room.
3. Don't bath before visiting. Your natural cologne is enticing to young noses.
4. Every visit to see me is your personal therapy session. Unload all your problems on children. They like hearing about your issues.
5. Lies. Lies are life. Use them liberally, and never let the truth get in your way.
6. Speaking badly of my parents is a good way to make friends with me.
7. Speak to me like I am small, stupid, and insignificant.
8. Pick a favorite sibling and focus only on them. It makes the other siblings feel valued.
9. Bad acting is a good way to convince me you are sincere and trustworthy.
10. Repeatedly remind me how the awful things you are doing to my family is 'in the best interest of the child'. I believe you.
11. Share private information about the vulnerable children you work with. Don't let data protection get in the way of a good rumor.
12. No straight answers. Dodge all questions or change the subject. There is no need to clarify or explain anything.

## The Truth Is Out - Hear My Cry

### The Truth is Out - Hear My Cry

Sharing my story is hard but it will allow me to feel a sense of freedom, as if a degree of justice has been served to those who stole me and my sister from our family.

I was silenced for two years, living in perpetual fear and despair in the so-called "care" system. I tell this story for that girl, her sister and her mother, who were kept separated so my social worker could cover up her lies.



My social worker claimed my mum had "Munchausen's by proxy syndrome" and was fabricating and inducing mental illness in me. When I was living at home, my mum met with several psychiatrists who all stated in written reports that she was completely free of mental illness while I was given a diagnosis confirming my mental illnesses to be true; in spite of all the evidence my social worker proceeded with her plans to place me and my sister in care.

During my time in "care" I was forbidden to attend any Children's Hearings. Despite writing over thirty letters to panel members and begging my social workers to let me go, the answer was always no.

*This was so I wouldn't be able to tell the truth.*

I still don't feel safe: I think I'll never feel truly *safe*. But I'm tired of being a victim and a prisoner in my own life - not even permitted to enter the garden unattended! I want to shout out the truth loud and clear for everyone to hear because these appalling events have been kept secret for far too long.

"Care" destroyed my trust in people. I was abused sexually and mentally in care. There was no one to confide in because the home I lived in had its own school. I was not permitted to see my GP alone; a staff member would always attend with me so I felt trapped and terrified. It became my normality to wake up full of dread. I was unable to sleep because I had developed psychosis and self harmed.

I attempted suicide at eleven years old with an extremely sharp woodworking knife but, luckily, I was stopped by a teacher and the school nurse before I could inflict any irreversible damage to myself. At court, my social workers claimed that I had "attempted to self harm using a butter knife."

I'm relieved to say that I've now escaped the horrific care system but I'm now in hospital with anorexia nervosa and a number of other mental illnesses. I never feel calm or at peace because I know my friends are still in that terrible system, being abused on a daily basis by degenerate, power-crazed bullies.

It has been very difficult for me to write this account and do it justice but, at the same time, it has been incredibly healing.

I want everyone who abused me in care to know that I am not afraid to share my story - they cannot silence the cries of a tortured child any more.

## Why I don't trust you

Why I don't trust you  
By Kat



I know I can't talk to you  
'Cause you won't listen to me  
Don't you know it's not alright  
I've lost the ability to trust

I want to run away, from you  
But where can I hide from social workers?

Who do you think you are?  
Running around leaving scars  
Snatching away children  
And tearing families apart  
But you're gonna get away with it  
Because it is all in the name of 'help'  
So, I don't trust you  
Who do you think you are

I see you everywhere  
You look like everyone else  
So, you could be anywhere or anyone  
I won't trust anybody

I want to run away from you  
But where can I run from social workers?

## A child like me

A child like me  
by Bunny



You see a child like me and I think you don't even see me at all.

You hear a child like me and you don't hear me at all.

You visit a child like me and you don't even see me, like I am not even real.

You think you know me but you don't know me at all.

You make big decisions in my life when I don't even want them.

You act like my family aren't real people.

You have meetings about me and I am not invited.

You say you care about me but you don't.

You say you care about me and my family and you don't.

You think things that aren't true and accuse us of it.

You don't know a child like me.

# Advice and Experiences from Parents



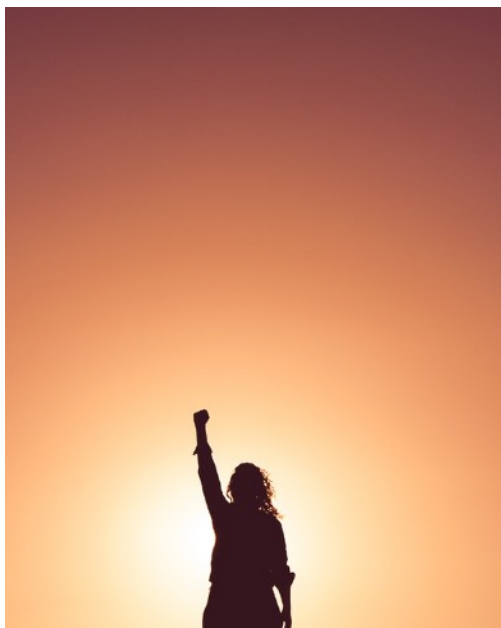
Living the experience of child protection, as a parent or grandparent is one of frustration, fear, stress and pain.

Growing up, regardless of the experience, we all look forward to the day we are officially in charge of our lives. Child protection takes that away. Parents no longer feel empowered to build a future of their own making. Many are restricted in where they can live, when they can see their child, what they can even say to their child and with whom they can have a relationship.

Advocacy can help parents to feel more empowered through the child protection process, and gives them a vital support. Children come with parents, and when they are removed parents often feel discarded by the process. No longer deemed necessary to their child's life.

Children need parents. It is long overdue, parents' deserve a voice.

## This was not my destiny.



This was not my destiny  
by Lisa-Marie Graham

I stood for many years in the shadows, afraid of the light,  
Chose to stay silent because the words didn't seem right,  
Scared to tell my story because it sounds so far-fetched,  
Scars of a thousand labels on my soul etched.  
I was a child in care, dragged up by the state,  
A victim of domestic violence by somebody I saw as my soul mate,  
My own children ripped out of my arms by the police after a false accusation,  
Six years of self-litigation,  
Precious time away from my children that I will never reclaim,  
Six years of trying to clear my name,  
Throughout it all I stood alone without one single friend,  
A bitter pill but I did it in the end.

It was this experience that leads me to where I stand today,  
I vowed that I would change the system somehow, someday,  
And through speaking out this is what I am achieving,  
Getting people like you believing,  
Believing that change is possible regardless of what path you are on,  
That the past has been and is long since gone,  
My voice is louder and stronger than ever before,  
Head held high not down at the floor,  
I was never a victim only a survivor,  
The fire ignited within is the main driver,  
This wasn't my destiny,  
But it is where I am meant to be...

## The Verdict

The Verdict  
by Susie

One word or two?  
She stood, we held breath.  
The world blurred away,  
Our lives dependant  
On the words she'd relay

What would she say?  
We'd waited for days  
Knowing it wasn't supposed  
To progress this way.

He told us "Don't worry"  
It'll soon go away.  
There's no evidence on you  
There's nothing to say!"

"On the first day of trial  
As full evidence is  
presented The Judge  
will say she'll acquit you".

But here we stand,  
Suspended in time.  
Jury still out  
What will they decide?

You behind glass, but  
our hearts beat in time.  
Jury comes back.  
Sit down in their lines.

Clerk asks the question.  
Twenty four eyes look  
Around, then at the floor.  
Remain staring down.

The foreperson stands,  
Arms by her sides,  
Smug expression,  
Eyes open wide.

My heart stops.  
I look to him, he to me.  
"Count one"  
One last prayer.....

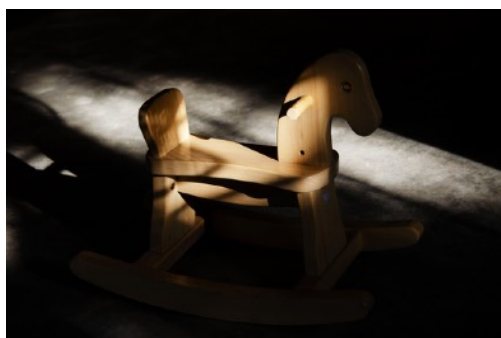
She says "Guilty"

Inside I scream out!  
Legs turn to jelly,  
Breathing in and out.  
Suddenly Im sitting down.

I look around and,  
My gasp whirls through  
The court room.  
"On Count two" she says,  
Still that smug smile.

"Guilty" she repeats.  
My heads spinning round.  
12 Jurors continue,  
Looking intently down.

Mouths agape,  
We looked to each other.  
Oh, No NO! We say,  
IT CANNOT BE!!



They can't take him.  
We are a family.  
We belong together,  
Him, the kids, me!

What will I do?  
Alone, on my own!  
Unused to the pressure  
Sad, lost, forlorn!

And then it got worse  
Day, by day, by day  
Social workers called in  
Wanna take kids away!!

Another big fight  
 Yet more sleepless nights?  
 Forced to confess all my  
 Failures, addictions & vice!!

The pain of disappointment  
 Glares from their eyes  
 I wasn't raised that way  
 I was brought up nicely!!

Another huge loss,  
 Another goodbye.  
 We are grieving again  
 Will life ever be alright?

## Advocacy Quotes

All Advocacy is, at its core, an exercise in  
 empathy. - Samantha Power

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent  
 about the things that matter. - Martin Luther King  
 Jr

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the  
 oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages  
 the tormentor, never the tormented. - Eile Wiesel

Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty  
 and truth and compassion against injustice and  
 lying and greed. If people all over the world  
 would do this, it would change the earth. -  
 William Faulkner

I know you can't live on hope alone; but without  
 hope, life is not worth living. So you, and you and  
 you: you got to give them hope; you got to give  
 them hope. - Harvey Milk

When the whole world is silent, even one voice  
 becomes powerful. - Malala Yousafzai

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to  
 go far, go together. - African proverb

## Mea Culpa



Mea Culpa  
by Ashley

From the moment you find out you are expecting, you experience a mother's guilt.

Could that cold I caught hurt my baby? What about that runny egg I ate before I knew I was expecting?

Nothing over nearly 15 years of parenting prepared me for the level of guilt that I would experience during safeguarding.

Next to grief and anxiety, guilt has to be up there in the top three primary emotions experienced by mothers going through the child protection process.

Very unhelpfully, social workers are skilled at interpreting these emotions as proof of a mother's incapacity to parent. In the most extreme cases, they actively use these common and normal feelings as ammunition in their risk assessments against the mother.

It commences such a damaging narrative.

Because a mother doesn't have to be guilty of child abuse or neglect to feel guilty.

Guilt is second nature to mothering: bottle or breast, work outside the home or stay at home, extracurricular activities or free time - Motherhood is rife with judgment, choices, and guilt.

What mother would not feel guilt when their child becomes looked after. Is there greater guilt? Not that I am aware.

Even if you have done nothing wrong, and honestly, there are plenty of cases where neglect and abuse against a child has not occurred; nonetheless, a mother feels overwhelming guilt and shame.

The old adage that you go into the maternity and leave your dignity on the door is over-egged. The maternity has nothing on the local authority. There is not a shred of dignity left once child protection engages with you.

It is absolutely awful, soul-crushing, to have to hand your child over, crying for you, calling out, 'Mummy!' and you are court ordered to walk away.

How is this not emotionally abusive? As a mother, you end up having to choose between your child and the law. Most mothers would agree that we would choose our child over the law, every day of the week.

And a new wave of guilt and despair sets in when we do not hold true to our beliefs. Another bullet to our heart as we abandon another important piece of our identity. How many mothers genuinely, confidently say they would wrestle a rabid bear to prevent their child from harm. And they mean it. I meant it, with every fibre of my being. Are social workers scary than rabid bears? Perhaps, or perhaps not, and in which case, it is truly a major blow to a mother's self image and her sense of wellbeing.

When I left my child in the arms of strangers, against her wishes, against mine. I didn't do it because it was right. I didn't do it because it helped her. I didn't do it because it was what I wanted. I did it because I was scared. Scared of how much worse the situation would become if I did not jump on command, and obey the court order. I felt guilt over my cowardice. Just months before, I had been the hero, the one who slayed the monsters under the bed. The only one who could fix any ouch with a kiss, could make her milk just the right temperature, who could sing a nursery rhyme in just the right way to make her laugh. I would have swam across the ocean for her, fought that rabid bear with my bare hands, would have cut out my own heart to save her's.

Then I learned that I am a coward.

I picked the law over my child.

Which was the *right* thing to do.

But it never felt right.

It made me feel guilty for every time I promised I would be there for my children. I had thought only death could separate us. It wasn't my intention, but I lied. **I was guilty of breaking so many promises.**

Unable to explain what and why things were the way they were. I felt like I betrayed her daily. When she took ill, and I was not there. When she cried for me at night and I did not hold her hand. When she was injured at the hands of strangers, and I could do nothing to protect her.

The reality is such that these emotions are not entirely transparent, they tell only part of the story. I was fighting for my child. In court and out of court. Had I put a foot wrong, the local authority was at the ready to hang me. But my daughter didn't know. she didn't know about all the meetings I endured as they spoke horrible abuse about me. Abuse that was not true. That they were not prepared to wait to find out the truth, so righteous they were in their pursuit of eliminating harm.

I felt overwhelming guilt that I could not fix the terrible situation in which we found ourselves and the events that had led up to it.

I felt so guilty when I shopped for my other children, still at home. Oh, how it hurt, to not be allowed to provide and nurture her the same as her siblings.

I felt guilt for my children at home, who had to cope with the contact schedule. A schedule that began so sparse, it hardly existed. Then became so rigorous, it was as though I was working away at a second job.

I felt so much guilt as I felt I was failing everyone. Not a single day went by where I succeeded at being the mother that I aspire to be.

My aspiration was not made purely of unreasonable expectations. I just wanted to be the Mum I had been, before our world was tipped upside down and inside out.

Day in, day out, I was physically and emotionally ragged while pretending to be unphased and happy.

You end up feeling guilt for pretending to be okay. Because, if you show you are not feeling great, it will be used against you. You end up feeling like a fraud no matter what you do.

Guilt will swallow you whole if you let it. It ravages your soul and steal away what little sunlight remains as you walk through the hell that is child protection.

There is no remedy that I have found, but what soothes the soul is knowing you are not alone. This guilt is universal through all mothers apart from their children. What you feel is a terrible kind of normal. **You are not alone.**

## A Grandfather's experience

I am a pensioner and step-grandfather to 8 children all under the age of 9 years.



I left school and home in rural Moray and moved to lodgings in a mining village in Clackmannanshire 7 weeks after my 16th birthday. Most of my working life was in criminal and civil law investigation and enforcement. Through business and pleasure, I traveled the World including countries emerging from civil wars. I have been involved in the voluntary sector plus a 2 year period as a constituency researcher for an MSP. The latter role saw me campaigning for families of Autistic people treated as schizophrenics and children wrongly diagnosed as ADD/ADHD. I thought I had seen it all.

I first encountered the Children's Hearing system as a police officer producing reports on juvenile "offenders" in 1971. My next encounter came when asked to support a friend at a Children's Hearing. What struck me was the attitude of Panel Members towards a teenage girl with obvious problems. They treated her as if she was 10 years old and totally ignored us. The Panel Chair asked what could be done to help the girl. I suggested nutritional supplements (knowledge from working with kids with ADD/ADHD). I was told in no uncertain terms that they knew nothing about it. So it would not be

discussed! My prediction as to what may befall the girl later proved correct.

At 4:30 pm on Tuesday, 13th September 2016, Stepdaughter phoned, social workers wanted her to voluntarily sign her two children into care. She refused and was threatened with an application for a CPO. My wife spoke to the social workers who seemed shocked that a family member should contact them. With social work agreement, we collected the children and Mum. A round trip of 380 miles in 7 ½ hours saw them back in our house. Until we contacted them, social work had not made an attempt to contact family about taking the children.

Prior to that, I believed the hype that Scotland had the best child protection service in the World and that children needed to be taken away from "bad parents". I believe in certain situations it is beneficial for children to be removed from parents (but not adopted against the parents' wishes) for a period of time. The question now being asked by Johann Lamont, MSP, Convener of the Scottish Parliaments Petition Committee in response to Petition 1673 submitted by me is **"whether we are inappropriately bringing children into care because there is not enough support or because there is a mindset that says that that is the solution."**

My 5-year-old grandchild had appeared at school with a bruise on his forehead. He was removed from class and interviewed by a social worker and a police officer. He allegedly "made a very clear statement that a TV remote control had been thrown at him". Over the previous 2 ½ years social workers had denied that the child had a learning disability/difficulty accusing the mother of "bad parenting". His vocabulary was so

bad nursery and primary schools were teaching him sign language to communicate. (Four and a half years on authorities now accept that he does have a major learning disability/difficulty, possibly on the Autistic Spectrum)

On Thursday we got a phone call advising a social worker and a police officer would “call in 10 minutes to take the child to be examined by a paediatrician”. Mum and Grandmother took the child to the hospital. Social work and the police met them in the car park they were escorted to the examination room - during this process, the police officer introduced himself to the child as “Uncle Kenny”! The social worker did not understand why the seven months pregnant, dyslexic mother became upset when told she could not enter the room as she was “the suspect”. The child told the paediatrician that he had fallen in his bedroom when playing with his sister. The Paediatricians report said clearly either explanation could have caused the bruise. There were no signs of assault and that the bruises present were what would be expected on a child of that age. Social workers later interpreted this report/finding as “inconclusive”.

The following morning two police officers and a photographer appeared at the house to photograph the “bruise”. Having taken that photograph they insisted that they had to photograph all bruises and marks across the whole of the child’s body. Discussions took place during which the police refused to note the name of a friend who was present when the child fell and bruised his back. We were later accused of being abusive and aggressive towards the police!

At 9:15 pm, a social worker telephoned to say Elgin Sheriff Court had issued a Child Protection Order at 8pm and two police officers and a social worker were en route to remove the children. They arrived at 11:30 pm accompanied by a foster carer. Both children were woken and carried to

a strangers car. The social worker handed over paperwork which she described as “affidavits”. An affidavit is a document presented under oath.

Being a Friday night we could not get any help or advice until Monday. At 9:30 am on Monday we were told the “48 hour” Hearing would be at 3 pm the following day in Stirling, (a drive of 185 miles) should we wish to attend. We later learned that the two children were collected that day from Moray and taken back to Falkirk, “a place where they went to school and belonged”. The children were put to school and nursery on the Tuesday in Falkirk despite having been registered in schools in Moray in the in-between times.

At the “48 hour” Hearing, Panel Members agreed that “there had been a lack of communication between Falkirk social workers and the family”. The children were returned family. When we collected the children they were very traumatised, especially the older one. It took him several months to get over his ordeal. There was no social work input for over 8 weeks until the case was transferred from one Authority to another. At that Hearing, we were shocked at the lies being told to the Panel Members. The Panel Chair advised a social worker to be quiet as he was ranting purely on supposition with no evidence.

When I had the chance to read and study the “affidavit” presented to the Sheriff in Elgin, it was full of deliberate misinformation and downright lies. I complained to Police Scotland of Perjury. 8 months later I was told that as the “Affidavit” had not been submitted under oath, no crime had been committed.

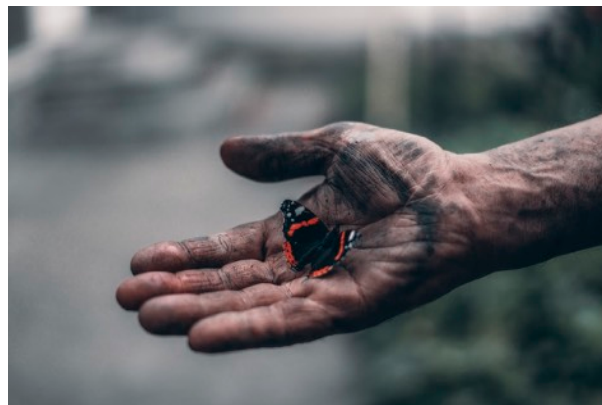
Over the next 2 years, the family went through what can only be described as hell. At all meetings, social workers for the receiving authority said that they could only act on reports from the

transferring Authority and that they could not question other professionals reports. Our protestation that the application to the Sheriff contained lies was ignored. Following Subject Access Requests to both authorities (these took almost 2 years to obtain and only with the involvement of the Information Commissioner), we discovered that the files on the children were retained by the transferring Authority and were not seen by the receiving Authority.

We attended a number of Child at Risk meetings and Core Group meetings as per the legislation. **These are best described as bear pits.** Social workers always outnumbered other professionals in the room and it was plainly obvious that decisions were made before we entered meetings. Minutes of previous meetings were presented to us as we entered the next meeting. We are still waiting (despite requests) for minutes for one very controversial meeting. If we questioned any point made by social workers we were classed as “non-engaging”, a term used to support social workers cases/reports to Children's Hearings/Sheriffs.

A Children's Hearing removed the compulsory Supervision Order after two years. Our experiences have left the family traumatised. It was our experience that most social workers involved with our family were devious, manipulative and told blatant lies on a regular basis to Children's Hearings. Through many friends and the Petition process, I now have a large network of mothers, families, and others who have experienced in many cases far worse than us. I am surprised and pleased with the number of professionals who agree that the system of child protection is more harmful than taking no action at all.

Based on our experiences and those of many others I have submitted a number of Petitions to the Scottish Parliament.



The first, Number 1673, is asking for “An independent QC led investigation into all aspects of child protection in Scotland”. It is ongoing. I have submitted another four which have yet to be accepted. They are:

- “To make it a criminal offence for anybody to knowingly supply false and misleading information in any child protection Hearing or Court”;
- “To review adverse impact on children through changes to rights of residency in rented property”;
- “To give the Care inspectorate powers to investigate individual complaints about child protection” and
- lastly “To ensure all discussions within a Children's Hearing are recorded/minuted and available to future Hearings/Sheriffs”.

# Fiightback



Fiightback is an organisation started five years ago by parents who have been falsely accused of FII.

What is FII? FII stands for fabricated or induced illness, or in old money, Munchausen's by proxy. This accusation has been on the rise as master classes on the subject become more popular. FII is an incredibly rare form of child abuse. A very serious form of child abuse, whereby a parent harms their child through inducing or inventing illness.

Too many parents of children with additional needs, rare or complex illness, or medical negligence find themselves going through the child protection process as part of an investigation. This accusation rips apart families, destroys financial security and can delay and hinder the necessary support or medical treatment children need.

The parents who go through such a terrible accusation come out the other side feeling traumatised and very alone. Having been attacked by those who we are meant to trust most. Fiightback was established to support, educate and help parents rebuild their lives.

For more information or support, please visit - <https://www.fiightback.co.uk>.

## I wasn't prepared for the trauma it brought

I wasn't prepared for the trauma it brought  
By Sarah

Sitting and watching children play,  
something inside told me my son wasn't OK,  
took him to the doctors,  
who referred him to peads,  
they said he had certain needs,  
this was the start of help I thought,  
I wasn't prepared for the trauma it brought,  
waiting lists took years,  
the harder it got with anxiety and fears,  
I just wanted help for my blue-eyed boy,  
being a parent shouldn't be like this it should be of joy,  
I reached out asked for help,  
I wasn't ready for the cards I was dealt,  
in they come accusations thrown around,  
my life was turned upside down,  
they believed I would crack,  
but I had too much fight,  
I was asking for help with my son,  
because I knew something wasn't right,  
we become prisoners in our home,  
having to download call recorder to my phone,  
the people who are meant to help let us down,  
no care in the world but I didn't let them knock my crown,  
now it's coming to an end who's going to pick up the pieces of destruction,  
how are we going to repair and get back to normal and refunction?



## Sick child to falsely accused

Sick child to falsely accused  
by Mum

I am putting on my breast plate  
And picking up my sword  
Listen to my voice  
My child is in need and I will find an  
answer.



If you won't listen to me  
Listen to my child  
All babies cry, but not scream in pain

The pitch will pierce your heart

Do not patronise me  
My research is good  
Google is my friend  
I am an intelligent woman

If you don't know, say so  
Research it, don't fob me off  
Don't forget about us,  
smile and shout next

Sometimes 'how is your day?'  
Is the hardest question in the world  
Oh to have a second of normal  
My voice will crack and tears will flow

I don't care what you call it  
Fix my child and we will be on our way  
One day is too long for a child in pain  
Six weeks is criminal

A hijacked meeting,  
Accusations fly,  
Sick to my stomach,  
Calm, shock, crumpled

The little things count,  
a text, a smile  
Just to listen to your day  
Life, I am still here, broken but here

Cleared by a specialist,  
Child diagnosed  
Left alone, in tatters  
Life destroyed, forever scared

## In my best interests

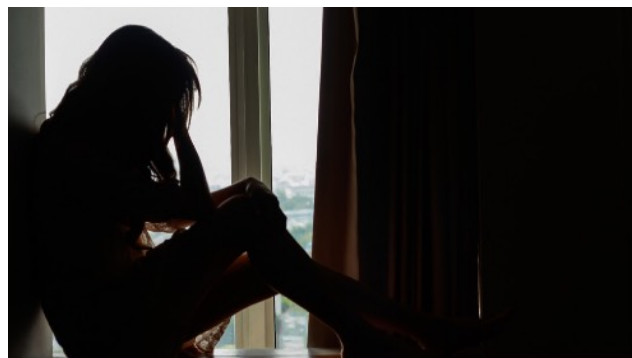
In my best interests  
by Jessica

It's in my best interests they say  
That's why they took me away  
They left my Mummy heartbroken  
They said 'Justice' had spoken  
Two parents wrongly accused.

It's in my best interests they say  
Just pulling my family away  
Left hurt and confused  
Torn up and bruised  
But these are the games they play.

It's in my best interests they say  
I hope I see Mummy and Daddy today  
One day when they've won  
Our hearts will beat as one.

Corruption can't win  
These events are a sin  
But  
It's in my best interests  
they say!



## The grief is never ending

A poem about parental alienation and  
forced adoption  
by Jessica

The grief is never ending  
They ripped my daughter away  
Placed in the arms of a stranger  
That is where they want her to stay  
A fighting, grieving mother  
It's my voice they wish to smother  
All these stolen children  
Sold one after another  
So, don't tell me it will be okay  
I wake without her every day  
They chose her for her beauty  
Lied and said it was a social workers duty  
Now, they want adoption, they say it is  
the only option  
Family court corruption  
Wake up to this disruption.

## Broken

Broken  
by Mum

Tonight the pain, the guilt, the worthless feeling, the emptiness, the abuse, the abandonment, the mental torture, the judging, the being labelled, the being watched, the backstabbing, the looks, the not being about to leave your house and to scared to answer the door, the loneliness, the general being scared, then there is no escape, the racing thoughts, the flashback, the nightmares, the sleepless nights because I am to scared to sleep, the damage, the no purpose, the no structure, the lack of routine.

Are getting far to much and breaking me into even more tiny pieces, and killing me, dragging me down and there is no other way out.

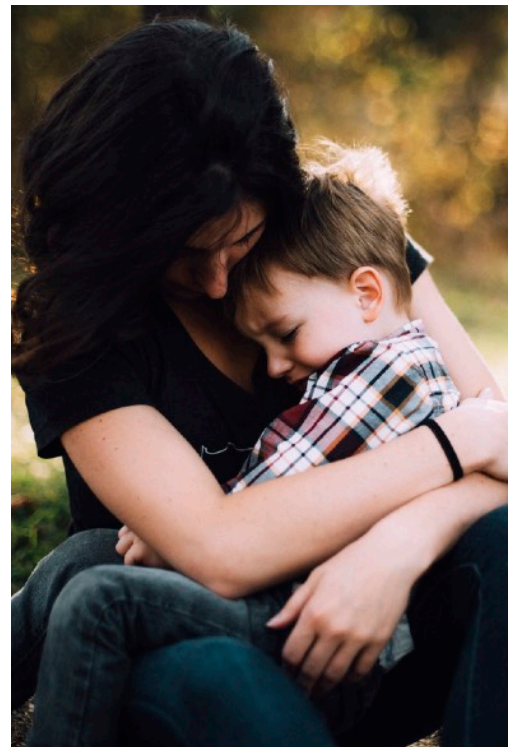
That smell, that cuddle, that kiss, that eye in your eyes, that little giggle, that cheekiness, that mess, that hair pulling, those sleepless nights of crying and feeding and up and down and cuddles. And yes even that cry I miss so much more than words can say. That feeling of not just having my sons ripped away from me and put only god knows where and god knows who, but also being blamed for something you haven't done, and for your sons' reactions to it, but also that feeling that I am now no longer a mum. Just a person, a broken woman, empty and lonely and not living just existing.

They broke me, the broke you, they broke us and most importantly they broke our bond.

Wish know that when my body is no longer here I will still be with you my blood runs through your body, that cheeky smile is mine, them big brown eyes or mine and the little button nose is mine, your big bold personality is mine, and no will never no what it felt when your wiggles and moved inside me and your the only one who knows the sound of my heartbeat from the inside.

The first time I saw them two lines I knew I would you, the first time I saw your heartbeat on that screen I knew I would love you, the first time I smelt your head I knew I would love you, the first time I looked into your eyes and looked back I knew I would you, the first time you held my finger I knew I would love and best of all the first time you took your first feed from me I knew i would love you.

They broke me and I will never be the same person, they destroyed me and my family and now I am left with nothing but an empty home I shouldn't have, with empty beds and toys not being played with clothes not being used, and it destroyed my relationship, and trust in people. Now I am just an empty shell. What little time we had together were the best moments of my life, but now that's gone forever. So bye forever boys.





## Professional Advice

Professionals have the power to change and enrich the lives of children and families. So many of them do so with great care and determination. When professionals work in partnership with parents, it changes the lives of children in an exceptional way.

We are delighted to have advice from legal professionals, social work, and the Lifelong Links team at Edinburgh council.

The professionals in the following articles will share their experience and knowledge in an easy to understand way about topics which are important to parents.

We welcome advice and contributions from all professionals involved with families and child protection please email: [parentsadvocacyandrightsmag@gmail.com](mailto:parentsadvocacyandrightsmag@gmail.com).

## Lifelong Links - Family Group Decision Making



Lifelong Links - Family Group Decision Making  
by Julie Falconer

**City Edinburgh Council, Lifelong Links service.**

### How it started

Lifelong Links aims to build on and restore positive lasting support networks of friends and family for children in care, either in foster care or residential.

In 2015 coordinators in Edinburgh's Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) service began to identify the need for more robust work engaging the family & friend's networks for children in care. They recognised that important relationships, identified by the child should be nurtured throughout childhood and beyond and are often lost or disrupted for children in care.

Too often children leave care with little knowledge about their own family and no one to seek out for advice and support other than the professionals that they are linked to. The team started to use Register House (Scotland's people) to research family trees, social media to find people and working with the young person to help them identify who they remember as being important to them from their past.

Around this time the Family Rights Group; <https://www.frg.org.uk/> were thinking along the same lines.

In 2016 the Family Rights Group secured funding and developed the Lifelong Links model. A combination of the Family Group Decision Making model, which originated in

New Zealand and a Family Finding model, which originated in USA. The funding has allowed for 8 trial sites across the UK, City of Edinburgh being one of them. By placing Lifelong Links within FGDM service ensures the offer of this service to children and young people is an independent one, as coordinators have no involvement in plans or decisions about children's care.

All the trial sites are being evaluated independently, in Scotland this is by Celsius. The evaluation aims to determine whether Lifelong Links is effective in improving meaningful connections and life outcomes for children in our care.

### Why Lifelong Links

Research is repeatedly showing us that children who have been in our care have poorer life outcomes than their peers; more likely to become homeless, go to prison, have poor mental health, feel isolated and lonely and be unemployed. What often underpins these difficulties are frequently limited and complex relationships and connections with anyone from their family and friends network.

It is not uncommon for some of our children in care to have numerous professionals in their life but arguably no one who will be there when the care episode ends. It is not uncommon for children in our care to get no birthday or Christmas cards and presents from anyone other than professionals. Often important relationships become fractured or are ended when children come into our care, through no fault of the children themselves.

Thomas Tomlin (social worker, care experienced person and member of the Scottish care review team) talks about how, the state defined who his family was and each time they (he and his twin) moved placement that "family" was re defined by the state again and again. This resulted in repeated losses of important people and places to him; foster carers, full siblings, foster siblings, professionals, pets, friends, houses, bedrooms and schools.

<https://www.carereview.scot>

All too often it seems that the question is not asked about who is important to each child, who do they see as the person that has their back rather than the people professionals view as important. This raises a question about who is best placed to open up that discussion with children.

We frequently place our children in a position where they have no voice in this discussion, think on this; how comfortable would a child be asking a social worker to have contact with their old next door neighbour? The one who sheltered and fed them and had their back when their parents were at home drinking, hugely important to that child but invisible, and often "a nobody" in our professional world. And if this neighbour is important to you, how do we make sure you stay connected now and in the future? Lifelong Links is about future proofing.

We recognise that by supporting enduring relationships, children in care can gain ongoing, lifelong support; practical and emotional. They can hear first-hand family histories and develop a much clearer sense of identity, belonging and sense of self.

We know the majority of children in our care move back to stay with family members, or drift back, even with the most robust Childs Plan.

If we give children in our care a single story of themselves, one which reads that they are a problem child from a problem family, then this is what children will believe and identify with and in too many cases strive to emulate.

Lifelong Links offers opportunities for children to explore their family network in a safe and supported way. One young person I worked with said “this is giving me some hope.....that things will be different, you’ll help me find my dad and sister”. (J. December 2017) Lifelong Links pulls in the care team; foster carers, social workers, residential staff, family, friends and opens up often avoided conversations. We should question what the future looks like for these children when the professionals have done their job, and they have left care. We know that the future is all too often poor life outcomes.

There is no doubt that by opening up conversations about lost family networks for children in our care it can cause anxiety about possible rejection, it can cause fears that unsafe adults will get back into children’s lives or that by talking about family and family networks children will become unsettled, placements could become destabilised. The flip side of this is that children will need to ask and have answered questions about their family, where do they come from and who do they belong to?

Questioning is a normal part of growing up and developing identity. We ignore this at our peril as a child’s family is an undeniable part of their lives, warts and all. We need to help children understand this and support them to make good decisions about who they could be connected to as they grow up and away from their professional’s world.

When children ask and need to explore family networks, most often during adolescence, we need to be ready with answers and ready to support that child feel safe and secure while doing this.

There is an immense benefit for them to receive for example; letters, cards, face to face contact regularly or at special family events.

Sibling contact has been a large part of our Lifelong Links work reconnecting children with lost siblings and half siblings. We have also seen a gap in paternal sides of the family where children have lost contact with paternal relatives.

So far the Edinburgh team have had 90 children referred to them for Lifelong links since 2015. The criteria for the service is children are in care with no plan for them to return home.

This poem was written by a young person who lives in residential care. She became involved with Lifelong Links in 2015 and is still involved by using the project to slowly but surely to identify people (family, friends and professionals) in her life that she has become disconnected to, through no fault of her own. She has also connected to people that she did not actually know but knew they existed and vice versa.

This poem is what Lifelong Links means to her;

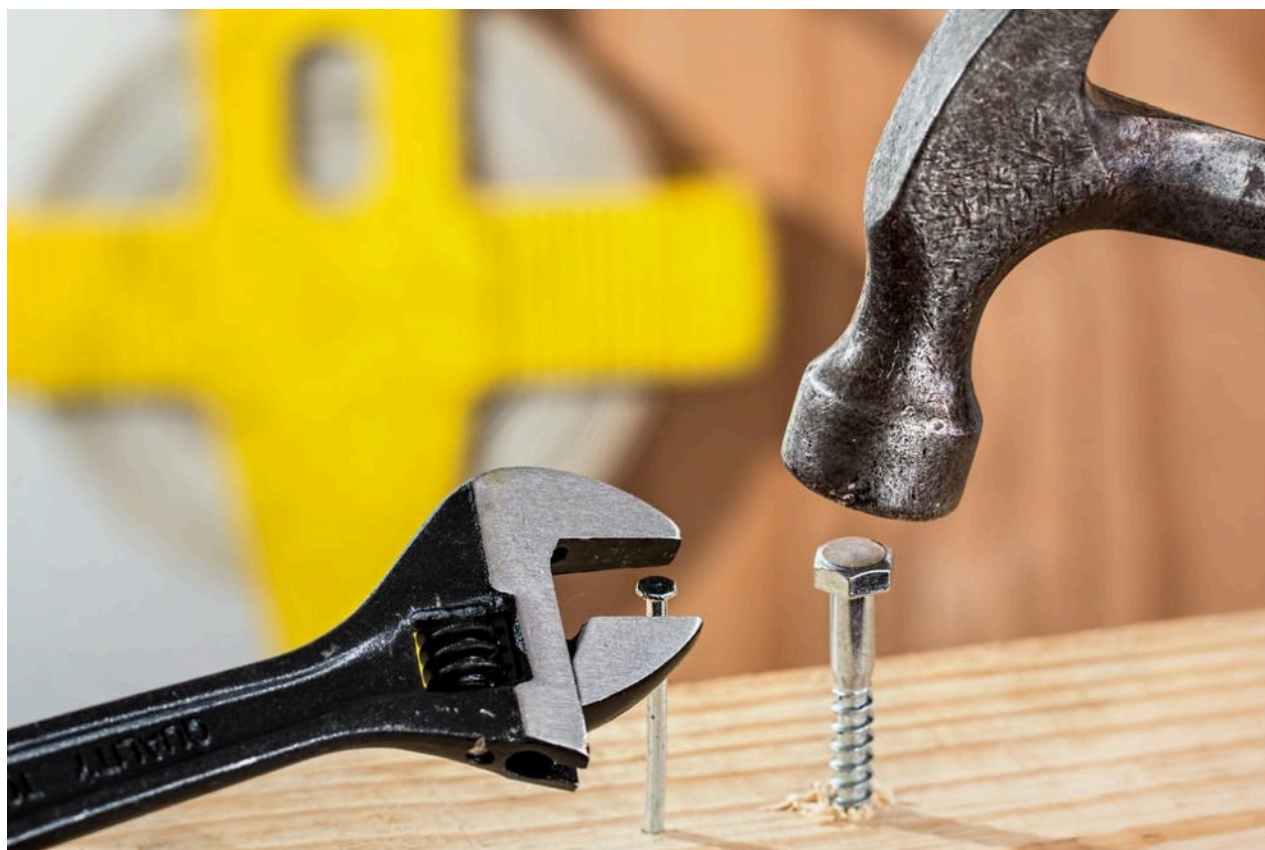
Life long links  
Take a right long think  
It might not sink  
In until you hit the brink  
Of this rink that's frozen  
So break it open  
Seize this moment  
Realize the importance  
The good that it does  
Builds foundations for love  
Helps rise above  
Past use of drink or drugs  
It's not about them  
It's not about you  
It's about finding the ones  
That love me too  
In a life that's askew  
Filled with drink and abuse  
I think that we should  
Find the family that's good  
Not sure what to say  
Not sure how to act  
I know for a fact  
I'll get my family back

Sandi Pentland 2018

More of Sandi's work can be found at Astroknot on Soundcloud and @Scottish Astroknot on Facebook

**Family Group Decision Making-Lifelong Links can be contacted on 0131 221 2210 or [lifelonglinks@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:lifelonglinks@edinburgh.gov.uk)**

## Assessing your social worker



Assessing your social worker  
by Maggie Mellon

(How to know if you are suffering an Adverse Children's Services Experience - Caution: these ACSES can lead to life long harm to you and your children)

Many social workers are good, caring and ethical. Some are not so good. Most are working without proper professional support and supervision, and there is a great pressure on them to arrive at opinions and take actions quickly. They have very few resources to offer to families. Social workers who remove children unnecessarily and cause harm don't seem to suffer any professional or personal but social workers who don't remove children and the child is harmed or killed usually have their personal and professional lives ruined. That is the context that you are meeting your social worker in. Often they are very inexperienced – - child protection social workers as they are now called have a very short career usually - and they are trying to act confident and as if they know what they are doing. In fact the more experienced and the more confident a social worker, the more likely he or she will be to admit uncertainties, acknowledge when services are not good enough, and be able to apologise for getting things wrong. They will offer empathy and understanding, and support. They will be honest and open. They will build trust with you. Anything less than this is not good enough social work. So how to know if they are good enough?

Social workers often work to risk assessments check lists. Here is a risk assessment check list for you to use in assessing your social worker.

Risk indicators – have you got a “non-engaging” social worker?

- Social worker does not introduce herself or himself properly – does not offer to shake hands or make any attempt to make you comfortable in their offices (no offer of water, or tea, no showing where toilets are etc)
- Social worker is over-friendly, calls you by your first name, and treats you very informally and casually without asking your permission
- Social worker does not keep eye contact with you
- Social worker reluctant to make definite appointments to meet you to discuss the case
- Social worker often late or cancels any appointments made
- Social worker insists on verbal or text communication instead of email or mail
- Social worker stays standing and keeps coat on in your house and keeps car keys in her or his hand and insists they are very short of time
- Social worker fails to return calls or emails

NB these may be merely signs of being over stretched, lack of experience and lack of confidence. However, if calm and determined efforts to reassure and engage do not work, and the social worker resists or fails to engage with you, you should look out for some of the following in the course of your family's contact with this worker.

Signs of an abusive social worker

- Social worker informs you of decisions that have made about you without consulting you or your children
- Social worker acts highhandedly cancelling contacts or curtailing or moving contacts
- Social worker makes rules forbidding gifts, toys from home, refusing to allow gifts, or hugs with your children during contact
- social worker refuses to explain the "rules" they impose on contact with your children
- Social worker fabricates or embroiders or exaggerates reports of incidents that seem to be intent on establishing a case against you
- Social worker claims that they have information that they are unable to share with you or your family or representative but that it proves they are right
- Social worker insists on making decisions outside of proper processes, even if you object to these as harming you and your children.
- Social worker substitutes her own views for yours or those of your children
- Social worker insistent on keeping children away from hearings or LAC reviews
- Social worker tells lies about what s/he has said or done even when you have evidence to the contrary

Signs of Organisational abuse

- Managers refuse to investigate the social worker's behaviour despite being given proof i.e. claims made about visits, phone calls, which are demonstrably not true or contradicted by other claims

- Managers refuse to meet you or to require the social worker to meet you
- Managers refuse to adhere to their own organisational policies and procedures even when these are quoted or copied to them in correspondence
- Managers fail to respond to official complaints and/or deny having received them
- Managers lie in response to external enquiries by MSPs and councillors in order to defend the actions they have taken or failed to take.
- Managers refuse to alter minutes of meetings to reflect the actual discussion, your views or your children's views

What you can do to offset risk to you and your children from non engaging or abusive practice

- Try to get information ahead of any encounters – The Family Rights Group is in England but a lot of their advice is useful in Scotland too. There are legal helplines you can call – ChildLaw Centre, Clan Law, and local law centres and Citizens Advice
- Try to always take someone with you to meetings – someone who can be calm, ask questions, make sure that you get to speak and that you are understood
- At the outset ask for an explanation of the social worker's role and responsibilities.
- If it is a child protection issue, ask for them to explain what it is that they are worried that your children might be at risk of? Is it abuse? By you or by someone else? is it Neglect?
- Ask them how they will go about investigating this? how will they involve you and your children, and other family members and friends in finding out about you and your family life
- Remember – being open and honest and wanting to be cooperative does not mean that you should just agree with whatever is said or proposed to happen.
- Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand at the time that they come up
- Have a notebook and pen handy and say that you are going to write down things you think are important and also things that are agreed will happen next. Tell the social worker you will show them the notes at the end of the meeting so that she can agree what she has said. Ask to see any notes that she has taken so that you can agree them.

## Getting the right legal support



Getting the right legal support  
By Ashley

Getting the right legal support

Finding and accessing support when you are going through child protection is extremely important. It really can not be overstated just how important a support network is when going through this process. It can seem unclear at what point in the process you are meant to seek legal advice.

The child protection register is not bound by statute, and as such, it is not a legally binding process. Hence, most parents won't seek any kind of legal advice until they are neck deep and facing a compulsory order. Many solicitors will have little experience before formal litigation begins. Which makes their ability to advise you a little more complicated.

Meanwhile, many parents delay asking until the last moment, because local authorities tend to view seeking legal advice as combative (a topic for another day). Please do not hesitate to seek advice because of fear.

Child protection brings many parents into legal offices for the very first time. Scared, vulnerable, angry and filled with shame. Law firms are filled with helpful people. People who have dedicated their lives to upholding the rights of others. Don't be intimidated.

Many people will never have had to employ or instruct a solicitor before. Without a frame of reference, it is really difficult to feel confident in your solicitor and their handling of your case. It is very important that you feel confident in your solicitor and that you are able to communicate effectively with them.

In a perfect world, the professional should take on the responsibility to manage and care for the client; however, speak to any group of parents in family court, and you will find the vast majority of solicitors seem to be forgetting this aspect of their role.

This is your life, your child, your case, and unfortunately, it probably will fall to you to manage your relationship with your solicitor.

Fairly common advice online will advise that parents do not seek a solicitor from their local area. This is to prevent instructing an ex- local authority solicitor. The fear seems to be that this person will invest themselves less in providing a fair hearing. Technically, every solicitor has a duty to their client, a professional and legal obligation to provide the best service they can provide.

Forgive me, as there will undoubtedly be exceptions, but local authority solicitors are not cream of the crop. An ex-council solicitor is even less likely to have the capacity to give a complicated case the support that it will need.

Ideally, it would be best to choose a solicitor by recommendation based upon a referral which most closely matches your case. If you have been blissfully ignorant and have never had cause to keep in the loop with which solicitor is most capable with specific types of case, which will be true for almost everyone, it may be worth a thorough internet search. Begin researching solicitors who handle your specific type of case. From this list, make office or telephone appointments with at least two law firms. Pick the person with which you will be most comfortable discussing your case and whom you feel most confident.

Too many parents assume that once they have spoken to a solicitor that they now have a solicitor. This is not true. It may be helpful to understand the process a solicitor will go through once you make contact.

Once you have had an appointment with a solicitor they will open a file on your case. This does not mean you are officially a client. This simply documents your appointment.

The solicitor then has a number of professional duties that they must undertake before the potential client becomes a client.

The solicitor must fill out a risk management questionnaire which evaluates the risk of a potential client.

Next, a conflict check must be undertaken. This will check to make sure that there will be no conflicts of interest when the solicitor takes on your case.

Once these admin jobs are complete, the solicitor will write up a client care letter. This letter will summarise the details of what you have told the solicitor and your instructions.

This is an opportunity for a potential client to clarify how they want the solicitor to act on their behalf. It is important that a client clarify any misunderstandings, or mistakes that are within the client care letter. The initial client care letter will also include several other pages, such as the terms and conditions of instruction. At this point, a client will also receive legal aid forms or money needs to be discussed.

From the time clients receive the client care letter they have a window in which they can change their minds without question.

Only once the solicitor has successfully completed this process are they able to act on a client's behalf.

Once you have instructed your solicitor, had your financial arrangements made and you have confirmed you are happy for them to act on your behalf, can you now officially say you have a solicitor!

Getting the right legal support doesn't stop once you have instructed a solicitor. They will be with you throughout the remainder of the litigation.

#### Tips for getting the most out of your solicitor

1. No matter how difficult or how bad it feels, don't try to deceive your solicitor. If you know something that could be harmful to your case, tell your solicitor. It is far better that they hear it from you than to reach a hearing and find out this information from the opposing side. By telling your solicitor the good and the bad early, it gives them the ability to find a way to counter the negative.
2. Keep in touch. If you have questions or have not heard from your solicitor in a while, call their office and book an appointment or telephone appointment. Ideally, you will discuss at the beginning of your client/ solicitor relationship how you will communicate going forward. Email/ mobile/ office visits?
3. Listen carefully to the advice you are given. It could make or break your case. Keep in mind, you have no obligation to agree or follow the advice.
4. You are instructing your solicitor. Do not hesitate to instruct your solicitor. If you feel your case needs an independent assessment, instruct your solicitor to make it happen. A good solicitor is motivated and creative at achieving the best outcome for their client.
5. Respond to your solicitor promptly. The largest part of the time spent in proceedings is waiting for people to provide relevant information. Your solicitor will spend a lot of time chasing a list of people to move your case forward in a timely fashion. Do not be the person your solicitor is chasing. It is so frustrating when 6 months after the court order for the production of documents, you are still waiting. It feels unjust. Nonetheless, do not be the person who keeps your solicitor waiting.
6. Make sure you are clear about what you want to happen and about what is going to happen next. Never hesitate to ask twice or go over something you are unsure about.
7. Takes notes of every phone call and keep all correspondence.
8. Keep copies of any paperwork that may be relevant to your case.
9. Ensure that your solicitor has all relevant documents and information, promptly.
10. Cope with unfavorable advice. Your solicitor has a duty to explain potential risks. They are not being negative, they are simply doing their job.

# Resources

## Websites

PAR - Parents Advocacy and Rights

<https://parparentsadvocacyrights.com>

CLAN Child Law Centre

<http://www.clanchildlaw.org/>

The Scottish Child Law Centre

<http://www.sclc.org.uk>

The Family Rights Group

<https://www.frg.org.uk>

Keeping Families together

<http://www.keepingfamiliesaltogether.org.uk/>

MATCH - Mothers Apart from their Children

<http://www.matchmothers.org>

Fathers Network Scotland

<http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk>

Scots Mums Guide to Safeguarding and Child Protection

<https://thescottishmumsguidetosafeguarding.blogspot.com>

Fiightback

<https://www.fiightback.co.uk>

Parents against injustice

<http://www.parentsagainstinjustice.org.uk/>

Justice for Families

<http://www.justice-for-families.org.uk/>

Unity Injustice

<http://www.unity-injustice.co.uk/>

Advocacy Highland (Inverness)

<http://www.advocacy-highland.org.uk>

Advocacy Orkney

<http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/advocacyorkney>

Equal Say (Glasgow)

<http://www.equalsay.org>

Partners In Advocacy (Glasgow)

<https://www.partnersinadvocacy.org.uk>

The Advocacy Project

<http://www.theadvocacyproject.org.uk/advocacy-services/glasgow/>

Women's Aid

<https://womensaid.scot>

WomenZone

<https://womenzoneblog.wordpress.com/about/>

## Phone numbers

Scottish Child Law Centre 0131 667 6333

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 027 1234

The Relationship helpline 0808 802 2088

Support for prisoners' families 0800 254 0088

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs  
08080 10 10 11

Samaritans 116 123

Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87

Young Minds 0808 802 5544

Working Families 0300 012 0312

ParentLine Scotland 0800 028 2233

Lone Parent Helpline 0808 801 0323

Additional Support for Learning 0345 123 2303

Sleep Scotland 0800 138 6565

We would be delighted if readers would send us any information on resources which they have found useful or have heard about so that we can grow our resource list and assist more families.

If you want to contribute a story, article, poem, opinion, comment, resources, or have a query, please email:  
[parentsadvocacyandrightsmag@gmail.com](mailto:parentsadvocacyandrightsmag@gmail.com)