

One minute guide

October 2016

Cafcass

What is it?

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) is the voice of children in the family courts and helps to ensure that children's welfare is put first. Cafcass helps children and young people who are going through care proceedings, adoption, or whose parents have separated and are unable to agree about future arrangements for their children.

Cafcass is a non-departmental public body accountable to the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice and is represented on each local Family Justice Board. The service is independent of the courts, social services, education and health authorities and other agencies. It is a national organisation delivering services to children, families and the courts from 44 sites across England.

How does Cafcass operate?

The service operates under the rules and directions of the Family Courts. Once an appropriate agency or individual has made an application to the court, Cafcass become involved in a case at the court's request.

Cafcass practitioners are all qualified and experienced social workers. They work on both private and public applications.

Private law governs relationships between individuals (parental separation for example) and public law governs relationships between individuals and institutions (care proceedings for example).

In the majority of private law applications, Cafcass practitioners act as Family Court Advisors (FCAs). They provide judges with advice, information and recommendations to help them make safe decisions about each child's future. This includes working with children to find out their wishes and feelings, and reporting these findings back to the court.

In public law cases (and some private law) Cafcass practitioners are appointed as Children's Guardians. The role of Children's Guardians (previously known as guardians ad litem) is to represent the best interests of the child before the Court and ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are made clear. This is to ensure that a child's focused decision is reached.

What should practitioners do?

Practitioners working with children, young people and their families who are or become involved in the Family Court should make themselves aware of the work of Cafcass.

There is a range of information aimed at practitioners, children and young people and families available on the Cafcass website to support this work.

For general queries about National Cafcass you can contact them at: webenquiries@cafcass.gsi.gov.uk or tel: 0844 353 4332 or access the national Cafcass [website](#) for more information.

With thanks to Leeds Social Care

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