



Request for document translation

If you need any part of this document explained in your language, please tick box and contact us either by writing or by phone using our contact details below.

Your contact:

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone.....

Merton Safeguarding Children Board

Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
SM4 5DX

- ☐ **Albanian** Nëse ju nevojitet ndonjë pjesë e këtij dokumenti të shpjeguar në gjuhën amtare ju lutemi shenjojeni kutinë dhe na kontaktoni duke na shkruar ose telefononi duke përdorur detajet e mëposhtme.
- ☐ **Bengali** এই ডকুমেন্টের কোন অংশের বিষয় ব্যাখ্যা করতে চাইলে, আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন। আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করতে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।
- ☐ **French** Si vous avez besoin que l'on vous explique une partie de ce document dans votre langue, cochez la case et contactez-nous par courrier ou par téléphone à nos coordonnées figurant ci-dessous.
- ☐ **Korean** 만일 본 서류의 어떤 부분이라도 귀하의 모국어로 설명된 것이 필요하다면, 상귀하에 표시해하고 우리에게 전화나 서신으로 연락하십시오.
- ☐ **Polish** Aby otrzymać część tego dokumentu w polskiej wersji językowej proszę zaznaczyć kwadrat i skontaktować się z nami drogą pisemną lub telefoniczną pod poniżej podanym adresem lub numerem telefonu.
- ☐ **Portuguese** Caso você necessite qualquer parte deste documento explicada em seu idioma, favor assinalar a quadricula respectiva e contactar-nos por escrito ou por telefone usando as informações para contato aqui fornecidas.
- ☐ **Somali** Haddii aad u bashaan tahay in qayb dukumeentigan ka mid ah laguugu sharxo luqaddaada, fadlan sax ku calaamadoo sanduqa oo nagala soo xiriir warqad ama telefoon adigoo isticmaalaya macluumaadka halkan hoose ku yaalla.
- ☐ **Spanish** Si desea que alguna parte de este documento se traduzca en su idioma, le rogamos marque la casilla correspondiente y que nos contacte bien por escrito o telefónicamente utilizando nuestra información de contacto que encontrará más abajo.
- ☐ **Tamil** இது தகவல்களைக் கொடுக்க உதவுகிறது. உங்களுக்குத் தேவையான பகுதியைக் குறிப்பிட்டு, எங்களுக்கு எழுதி அல்லது தொலைபேசியில் தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள். கீழே கொடுக்கப்பட்ட தகவல்களைப் பயன்படுத்தி எங்களுக்குத் தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள்.
- ☐ **Urdu** اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کی کوئی بھی چیز سمجھنے میں آتی ہے تو براہ کرم اس پر نشان لگائیے اور ہمیں لکری یا فون پر رابطہ کر کے بتائیے۔ نیچے دی گئی معلوماتیں استعمال کر کے ہمیں رابطہ کریں۔

☐ Large print

☐ Braille

☐ Audiotape



The Merton safer parenting handbook

A guide for mums, dads and carers of children

aged **up to 11**

children and
young people  **merton
partnership**



Welcome to the Safe Parenting Handbook.

Your job as a parent is one of the most difficult there is - it can be both challenging and rewarding. You may feel you have been given very little training to prepare you for what you have experienced already and for what lies ahead. This handbook may help you now and in the future.

Every family experiences difficulty from time to time and this can test the best of parents and carers. When things go wrong it does not mean that someone has failed in parenting - things go wrong for everyone. Remember - there is no such thing as the perfect parent. When additional pressures come along, these can make a hard job nearly impossible. At these times it may be hard to think about what help or information you might need. However, there are some ways that can make it a less stressful and more positive experience for children and for parents.

What is the handbook about?

It is hoped this handbook can offer some ideas and information to help you find your way through what can be a maze of issues and advice. It gives local and national contacts and further information you can follow up when you are

deciding how to deal with your worries and difficulties. This handbook also lists some of the warning signs of particular difficulties and offers helpful tips.

Who will receive the guide and how can parents use it?

The Safe Parenting Handbook is targeted at parents of children aged 0-11 year. It is sent to parents of children who start primary school each year and given out by Health Visitors, Social Workers and other professionals. It is also available via libraries and many public access points.

The Merton Safeguarding Children Board has produced the handbook. The Board is made up of local statutory and voluntary agencies that work together to safeguard children from harm. I hope you find this handbook helpful and worth keeping for future reference.



Tony Eccleston

Independent Chairperson
Merton Safeguarding Children Board

Contents

 A guide to positive parenting, self-esteem and good behaviour	4	 Don't shake the baby	26
 Adoption and fostering	6	 Education	28
 All kinds of parents	8	 E-safety	30
 Bedwetting and sleeping difficulties	10	 Healthy lifestyles	32
 Bullying	12	 Play and learning	34
 Childminding, daycare, nannies and au pairs	14	 Private fostering	36
 Children left alone	16	 Safeguarding your child	38
 Children's Centres	18	 Safety in the home	40
 Children with disabilities	20	 Safety outside the home	42
 Choosing children's activities	22	 Starting or changing nursery or school	44
 Domestic violence	24	 Worried about a child	46
		 Young carers	48
		 Useful contacts	50



A guide to positive parenting, self-esteem and good behaviour

Make them feel great!

“*I know she's got her own life to lead. I just try to be around when she needs me or if she needs extra support.*”

- Let them know you're there for them whatever happens
- Be realistic and be careful not to expect too much from them particularly regarding exams and tests
- Children are happier if they have rules to follow
- Use play to teach your child good behaviour
- Listen to each other and talk together

Every day your child learns new things. It's what makes childhood such an exciting time. Your child will learn from you and your example and as a parent you have an important job in teaching them about your values and beliefs. Start this now and you'll see all your hard work pay off in the future.

Positive parenting is about bringing out the best in your child. Give lots of praise to build their self-confidence by talking about their strengths and not their weaknesses. Your opinion of your child had a huge impact on what they think of themselves; so being too critical can damage confidence. If you listen, try to understand their point of view and encourage their efforts.

Young people have to learn to make their own decisions and establish their independence. Unfortunately their decisions might not always fit with yours. That is why tension is normal. Choose your battles and let some go!

Be friendly and supportive and let them know you have been through it and that you are always willing to listen.

It's up to you to set boundaries - most children are happier living with rules. Be consistent. Rules work better when your child knows why they exist.

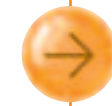
Remember to give them the practical information they need about any physical and emotional changes and reassure them that their development is perfectly normal.

A sense of self-esteem and being aware of some of the dangers they could come across is the best protection you could give them. Make them feel great!



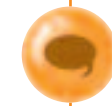
**WARNING
SIGNS**

Any changes in how they act? Is their self-esteem low? Are they trying to tell you something? Are they constantly unhappy, with mood changes? Are they being secretive and avoiding you?



ACTION

Be involved and try to develop an open relationship. Talk with them as much as possible and try to help them lead a healthy lifestyle. Do things together.



WHAT TO SAY

Praise your child when they are good and when they have done something difficult. Tell them you are unhappy with their behaviour, not them personally.



PREVENTION

Try to get them to make friends and have outside interests. Listen to their point of view. Help them think through choices around education and relationships.



CONTACTS

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- Supporting Families duty line 020 8646 4038 (9.30-16.30 Mon-Fri)
- www.merton.gov.uk/childrenscentres
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk 0808 800 2222



Adoption and fostering

Could you make a difference?

“All children need someone to care and guide them. As a foster parent you can make a real difference to a child's life.”

- You don't need to be superhuman!
- Foster carers and adopters come from all walks of life
- There are many different ways that you can make a difference to a child's life
- You'll receive excellent support and training

We need more foster carers and adopters to help children who are unable to live with their own families.

Children need to be looked after for all sorts of reasons. Many have been through difficult and distressing experiences and will need your time and support.

Foster carers and adopters come from all walks of life. We need ordinary people who can play an extraordinary role. You need to enjoy being with children, to be patient with plenty of energy and a sense of humour!

You don't need to be married, have children or any direct previous experience but you will need a spare room in your home for a child. We need carers who reflect a child's ethnicity and cultural heritage. We try to keep brothers and sisters together.

Types of foster care

Some children need to stay for a few days, others a few months and some need to be with a family until they

become adults. Foster carers can also offer breaks to children with disabilities and their families.

What support is available?

Fostering and Adoption Teams give help and support. You will have your own Social Worker and be given training.

Foster carers receive an age-related allowance and some are paid a fee.

Adoption

A legal process that permanently transfers parental responsibility from birth parents to adoptive parents. Choosing to adopt is a lifelong commitment. It is a process that will take time, effort and commitment on your part. You will have the help and support of the Adoption Team every step of the way. Experienced workers will guide you through the process and give advice and assistance.

The rewards of watching your child grow and develop are enormous.



WARNING
SIGNS

Research tells us that children who are unable to live with their own families are generally happier and do better at school, if they are in family-type placements, rather than children's homes. That's why we need more foster carers and adopters.



ACTION

Contact our Fostering and Adoption Teams and find out more about how you can make a difference to the lives of children. You will get support and training.



WHAT TO SAY

Discuss fostering and adoption with your friends and family. Could YOU make a difference?



PREVENTION

Prevent children from falling behind, by providing a safe, supportive and nurturing home environment.



CONTACTS

- www.merton.gov.uk/fostering-adoption-lac Freephone 0800 073 0874
- www.baaf.co.uk 020 7421 2600

All kinds of parents

What is a family?

“ Louise is my daughter. She is ten months old. I am a single dad - it is hard work but fortunately I have the support of a loving family. ”

- Your family is unique. Who is in your family? How does it work?
- Different people handle change in different ways
- Children need stability, and change can make them feel especially vulnerable
- Family change takes time to get used to
- Whatever kind of family you have, you're not alone - if you need help, make contact
- It's important to understand how your family make-up can affect children

There's no such thing as an 'average' family - every family is different. Merton's community includes two parent and single parent families, same sex parents, teenage parents, private foster carers and other caring arrangements (e.g. children living with grandparents). Some families will experience additional pressures due to significant life changes or the negative attitudes within their own family or the community. Helping children retain stability during these times is important for their welfare.

Going it alone - Growing up with one parent can be a good thing, leading to a close relationship. Encourage your child to spend time with their other parent if it's safe and possible. Help them understand how both of you will be part of their lives and that it's okay to love you both.

Coping with a death in the family - Every child will act differently, some will feel guilty about still living, others will think about death, loss and who else

could 'leave' them. Patience and the support of family and friends is key at this time. Support agencies such as Cruse have a helpline to help parents cope and useful advice on their website.

Teenage parents - As a young parent, you'll face extra challenges. All new parents struggle at times, so don't be embarrassed to ask for support and advice. Your education may have to be cut short, but don't give up on plans for the future. Think about your own needs and try to enjoy some of the things that other young people do. Make sure that you have good, reliable childcare if you leave your child at home.

New families - In a new relationship, everyone will need time to get used to things. If your new partner has children there could be extra challenges. Change can make us all feel unsafe, so it's important to make sure everyone feels secure. Take things slowly and carefully and try to see things through each other's eyes.



WARNING SIGNS

Changes in the way your child is acting. Watch out for feelings of blame or guilt if your relationship with your partner is not working.



ACTION

Talk through changes early - children are quick to pick up 'vibes' and may know if you're keeping something from them. Keep talking about the new things that are happening.



WHAT TO SAY

A stable family life is important to children, however unusual the make-up of your family. Remind them that they are loved, whatever is happening.



PREVENTION

Counselling, mediation and support agencies can help to spot possible problems. Know your rights. Talk to your child's school.



CONTACTS

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830 fis@merton.gov.uk
- www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- www.gingerbread.org.uk 0808 802 0925
- www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk 0844 477 9400



Bedwetting and sleeping difficulties

How can I help my child?

“ I tried to not get cross when I had to change the sheets again, and made sure I praised her for going all night without wetting the bed. It's made a huge difference, she's dry most nights now. ”

- **Bedwetting may be a sign of a health problem but more often than not your child will learn to control their bladder at their own pace**
- **Each child's sleep pattern is different**
- **Take time to sort out a bedtime routine, including a time for your child to relax and unwind before going to bed**
- **If your child often wakes in the night, try to find out why they have woken, for example because of a bad dream or being hungry**

Potty training - Your child is more likely to learn control if you are relaxed and calm about it. Children learn at their own pace and praise, rather than telling them off, helps. Between the ages of three and four years your child is likely to be dry during the day, with the odd accident. Remember, this is often not an instant change but a gradual process where more and more nights will be dry nights.

Bedwetting - It is not easy to know why some children take longer to be dry at night than others. However, bedwetting is not due to laziness or lack of willpower. Although this may be stressful for both you and your child, try not to lose your patience. It is rare for a child to wet or soil on purpose. If your child often wets their bed, the problem may be caused by a number of things. Talk to your child and reassure them that other older children experience this too. Talk to your Doctor, Health Visitor or School Nurse.

Sleeping difficulties - Most children experience a range of sleep problems throughout childhood and there are many reasons for this. We strongly believe that there is no single solution and that every family is unique.

Establishing a routine - It is important to get a regular night time sleep routine where they go to bed at a regular time each night. A warm and comfortable room is easier to relax in. A story at bedtime helps your child to unwind and relax.

Encourage your child to have at least six to eight good drinks per day. This will help to improve their bladder capacity. Aim for five of these drinks to be before 5pm.



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none, but does your child seem to be unhappy? Has something happened in the family or in your child's life that is worrying them?



ACTION

Stay calm if your child is wetting or soiling the bed. Is there a particular time when your child wets or soils? Talk to your Doctor, Health Visitor or School Nurse.



WHAT TO SAY

Talk to your child about how they feel. Try to keep calm and relaxed without showing signs of strain. Praise your child when they sleep through.



PREVENTION

Let your child know they can share any worries with you. If you want advice about things you can do to try to prevent wetting, discuss your concerns with your Health Visitor, Doctor or School Nurse.



CONTACTS

- www.suttonandmerton.nhs.uk
020 8251 1111
- www.eric.org.uk
0845 370 8008

Bullying

The real story

“It happens most days. They call me smelly and fat. They made me give them money again yesterday. They’re in the same class and they’re always laughing at me. They said if I tell it will be ten times worse.”

- Bullying takes many different forms
- Children have the right not to be hurt
- Teach your child that prejudice and bullying is unacceptable
- Bullying can happen to any child at any age
- Act immediately if you think your child is being bullied

Bullying is frightening

Bullying happens when someone hurts or frightens another person on purpose. It can make a child feel very alone and damages their self-confidence. Bullying can have long-term effects on children, leading to depression and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

Bullying can happen anywhere but it often happens at school. Other children’s opinions of them are very important to them. It is also very important for them to be one of the crowd. If children are thought of as different for any reason, they can be picked on or bullied. Try not to pass on any prejudiced thoughts to your child.

Bullying can take many forms, from verbal abuse, text messages, to violence. Most bullying is done by children who are the same age. (See also information in E–Safety chapter on page 30)

What you can do

The reality is that bullying can happen at any time and to any child. Make sure you know the tell-tale signs:

- Staying away from school.
- Missing or damaged belongings.
- Headaches, stomach aches, not sleeping well.
- Changes in your child’s mood.
- A drop in your child’s school results.

If your child tells you they are being bullied, listen. Discuss ideas to help them sort out the problem. They may also tell you about a ‘friend’ who is being bullied. Take this seriously as they may not be able to say for themselves what is happening or it may be your child who is being bullied.

All schools have an Anti-Bullying Policy. It is important that parents and schools work together.

Bullies may need help too

Bullies need support and help as well. They may have difficulties of their own which may have led to their actions.



WARNING SIGNS

Running away, staying away from school, learning and behavioural difficulties for no obvious reason, injuries with no feasible explanation and belongings damaged or missing.



ACTION

Talk to the school for their support and action. If bullying is happening outside school, consider contacting the family of the child who is bullying and work together to sort it out.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child to refuse to put up with bullying, walk away, tell an adult or friend and avoid fighting. Listen to your child, reassure and be there for them.



PREVENTION

Talk to your child about their school day. Teach your child to respect others from a young age.



CONTACTS

- Teacher or other school staff
- www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111
- www.bullying.co.uk
- www.beatbullying.org



Childminding, daycare, nannies and au pairs

How do I make the right choice?

“I was very careful to visit and discuss his needs at the after-school club. It now means I can work a full day knowing his needs are being met and that he is in a safe place.”

- All registered childcare in England must meet national standards
- Recommendations from friends are helpful but you should visit the childcare provider and ask to see their latest Ofsted inspection report
- Financial support is available for many families to help pay for childcare
- An au pair or nanny could be an option

Parents are often the best judge of which type of childcare suits their child. When you leave your child in the care of others, check that their needs are being met and respected. Make sure that your child is left in a safe place with well trained, experienced staff.

Main types of childcare are:

Group based

Early learning and care

- Primary school nursery classes are for children from three to five years old.
- Day nurseries are for children from birth to five years old.
- Preschools are for children from two and a half to five years old. Some accept younger children.

All three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free nursery education for 38 weeks of the year. This applies until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). Free nursery education can take place in nurseries, playgroups, preschools or at their childminders.

Out of school hours care

Breakfast clubs provide a healthy meal and care until school starts.

Afterschool clubs provide a safe place to play, relax and socialise.

Holiday playschemes and clubs are usually provided by schools, but can also be run by private or voluntary organisations. They can be held on school premises, or in youth clubs, village halls or community centres. They provide care and activities during school holidays.

Home based

Childminders are self-employed childcarers who look after children in their own home. They must be registered with Ofsted and can offer flexible childcare including before and after school. Four or more childminders working together must register as Childcare on Domestic Premises.

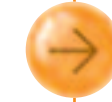
Home Childcarers, often referred to as nannies or au pairs, care for children in the child's home and often live in. They do not have to register with Ofsted but may choose to do so. Ensure you have recommendations and that you feel confident leaving your child in their care. Don't expect them to work unreasonable hours.

Merton's Family Information Service can help you to find childcare that meets your needs.



WARNING
SIGNS

Sometimes, children are not always able to tell you if something is wrong so look out for changes in their moods, what they do and physical appearance.



ACTION

Discuss your concerns with the childminder or the person in charge. If you are not satisfied with their response, contact the Family Information Service or Ofsted.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child who will be looking after them, where you are going, how long for and who they need to ask for their daily needs.



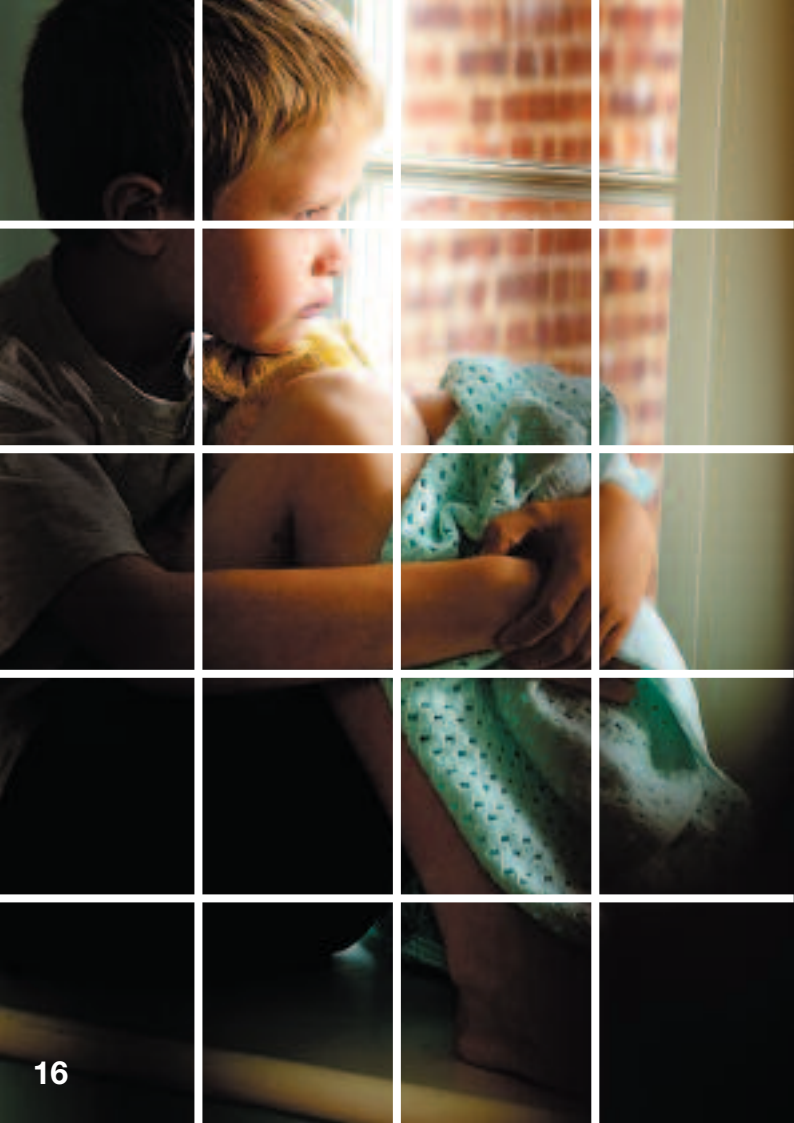
PREVENTION

Get recommendations. Look for experienced staff. Visit the place where your child will be cared for. Make sure you know what happens in emergencies.



CONTACTS

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- www.ofsted.gov.uk
0300 123 1231
- www.daycaretrust.org.uk
0845 872 6251



Children left alone

Common sense and the law

“When mum goes out, I lock the door from the inside - she calls in the letterbox to say goodbye, I leave the lights on in case anyone tries to get in. She usually comes home in the night when I am asleep.”

- ❖ **Never leave a young child alone**
- ❖ **Children under 13 years should not be left**
- ❖ **Children are not ready for this amount of responsibility**
- ❖ **Leaving a child alone places them at risk of harm**
- ❖ **It can be a lonely and frightening experience**
- ❖ **Plan who you could contact for emergency care**

If a child is not ready to be left alone they can feel sad, lonely, frightened and it can be dangerous. There are many possible risks, both physical and emotional, which could affect your child in a bad way.

Also it is not possible to rely on a child to let you know how much care they need. They may say that they do not mind being left and may find it fun at first, but they cannot fully know the possible risks and how to handle them.

Even ordinary things that happen in life, such as hunger, a storm, the phone ringing or someone coming to the front door can cause problems. An accident, feeling ill or a power cut may occur and these are not things that a child would know how to deal with.

It is never possible to leave your child and assume that someone will look out for them.

If they are told, the Police or Social Services may take action if they think

that a child has been neglected by being left alone. Neglect happens when a parent or carer does not meet children's basic needs of food, shelter, security, attention or protection from danger.

The NSPCC has issued guidelines advising that children under the age of 13 should not be left alone. While this is not the law, it is suggested as good practice. Children under this age cannot manage the responsibility of being left alone and this may be particularly so if they have a disability.

As a young person grows older, leaving them alone after school, for an evening or during the day is less worrying as long as they are prepared and know what to do if they are worried or need anything. So, preparation for this is vital. If your child is 13 or over and you feel they have the understanding to deal with this, it is important that they know where you are and who to contact in an emergency.



**WARNING
SIGNS**

Parents who have little support. A child who is often seen outside and all alone for long periods of time. Childcare arrangements that keep going wrong.



ACTION

If there is immediate risk of harm to a child, call the Police.



WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about a child being left alone, contact the police, talk to the parent, a Health Visitor, Teacher or Children's Services.



PREVENTION

Think about shared babysitting and chat to neighbours, friends or other parents. Find out about After-School Clubs and Holiday Play Schemes.



CONTACTS

- www.nspcc.org.uk
0808 800 5000
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk
0808 800 2222

Children's Centres

Giving your child the best start

“They say you experience a second childhood when you get old. I experience it every time I play with my child. I'd forgotten what fun it could be!”

- A network of Children's Centres are now operational across the borough offering support and advice to families with young children
- Not all centres provide the same service
- The centres are a good place to meet and talk
- Children of all ages learn through play - play is a vital part of your child's development
- Early childhood experiences affect children's attitude to learning

Children's Centres In Merton

Children's Centres bring together early learning, health and family support. Agencies are working together to provide early education for all, better childcare and family services, while actively supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment, education and training.

Merton has developed 11 Children's Centre services to provide borough wide coverage for all families with children under five. All centres are fully accessible and provide a range of services that meet the vision for Children's Centres.

What will I find at the Children's Centres?

- Child and family health services including health promotion, antenatal and breastfeeding support.
- Access to good quality childcare including links with childminders.
- Family support services including helping with the challenges of being a parent.

- Help and support to access training and employment.
- Advice to help families make the most out of their income.

Children's Centres are joining up with schools, local organisations, groups, NHS services, Jobcentre Plus and local service providers to create an invaluable service for families with young children in Merton.



WARNING SIGNS

If your child isn't receiving enough stimulation from you or from other carers, they may not be getting the opportunity they need to learn. It could affect their development and future attitude to learning.



ACTION

Make time to have fun playing with your child. Make sure other carers have a positive attitude to play and learning. Find out what's available.



WHAT TO SAY

Just go with the flow. Introduce as many different experiences as you can. Try to discover what sort of play interests your child and play along with them.



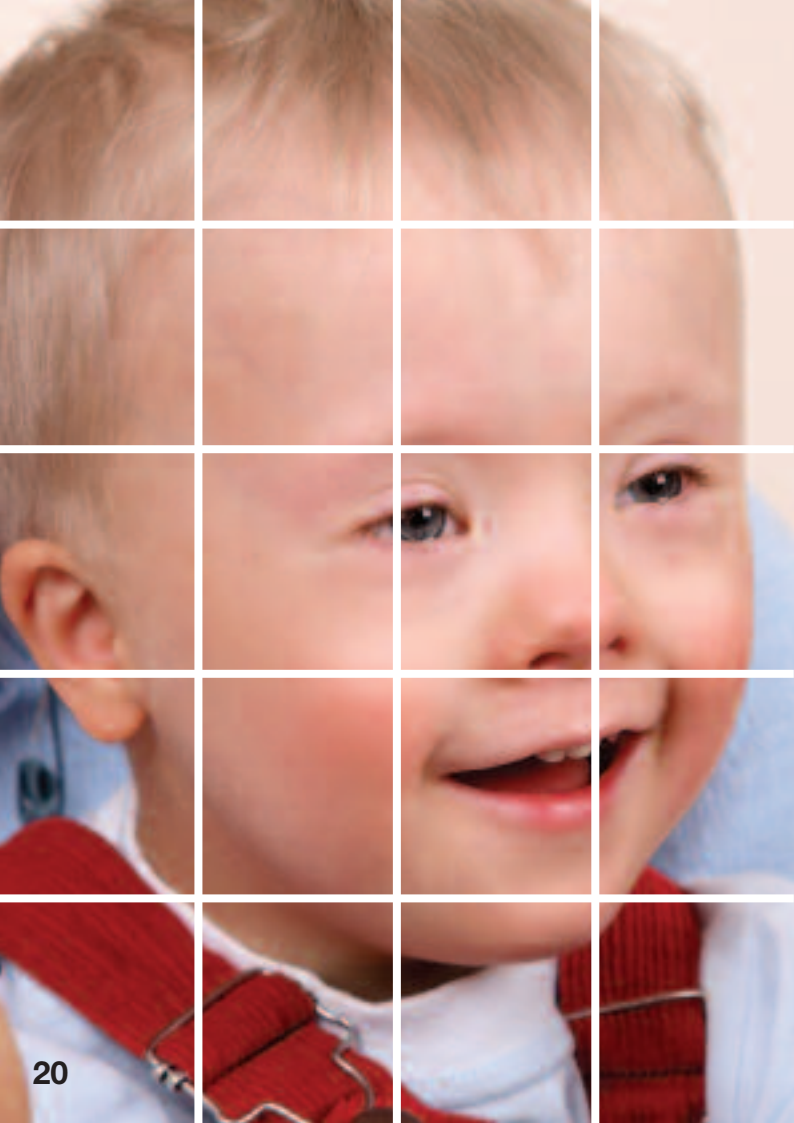
PREVENTION

Avoid letting your child get bored. Spend time with young children - keep them stimulated. Try to think up new activities for your child, especially ones for rainy days.



CONTACTS

- To find your nearest Children's Centre, call the Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
- www.merton.gov.uk/childrenscentres



Children with disabilities

You're not alone

“When I found out that Joe had a disability I didn't know how I was going to cope. I just didn't think I'd be able to do it alone. Pretty soon I realised I didn't have to.”

- Your child is protected by the Disability Discrimination Act
- The Government, your local council, education and health authorities are there to help
- You may be able to receive financial help to help you care for your child
- Support groups and other organisations are out there to help you cope
- 'Disability' covers a very wide range of different conditions

Legal protection

Your child is protected by law. The Disability Discrimination Act says it is against the law for anyone providing a service (including schools, businesses and organisations) to treat people with a disability less fairly than others because of their disability. It also asks them to make reasonable adjustments to their services (like ramps or disabled toilets) so that people with a disability can use them too.

Health

Your Doctor and local health service can give you the help and advice you need to discover and assess your child's disability. They'll help you plan treatment, therapy, equipment and ongoing medical care.

Benefits

There are several benefits that you could receive to help you with the costs of caring for a child with a disability. The Disability Living Allowance, Carers Allowance and other benefits help with extra costs. Claiming benefits and other concessions can be easier if you have

registered your child on the Disabled Children's Register.

Education

Depending on their kind of disability, your child may need to go to a special school (a place specifically designed to meet their educational needs) or to a mainstream school, with extra support through special needs provision. Your local authority and health service providers will help you find the best way forward for their education.

Make contact

You're not alone - get the support you need. Contact your Health Visitor, School Nurse, Doctor, and Children's Centre. In Merton we also have an integrated service which puts all of the early years support, social work support, access to short breaks plus the other specialist services for hearing impairment and special educational needs together. The service is located in the Civic Centre in Merton and at the Cricket Green health services site in Mitcham. Our Family Information service can also give you information about services available in the area.



**WARNING
SIGNS**



ACTION



WHAT TO SAY



PREVENTION



CONTACTS

Some disabilities are spotted early, others take time to appear or can happen quite suddenly. However it happens, you will need support.

Get as much information as you can about your child's condition. Find out about support and benefits. Ask about getting your child registered on the Disabled Children's Register.

Many organisations are set up to give support and advice. Contact them and tell your story.

You can't stop your child's condition but you can help by making sure that they get the best support available and understand both your and their rights for services.

- Integrated Service for Special Educational Needs and Disabled Children
020 8545 4200
www.merton.gov.uk/edspecialneeds
- Merton Family Information Service
020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo



Choosing children's activities

Have fun and be safe

“There are so many activities to choose from in local communities. But how do you know if they are safe?”

- Children have a right to have fun and be safe
- Organisations should be open and welcoming and should share information about themselves and their activities
- You have the right to the same standards of care from all organisations, whether their workers are paid or are volunteers
- Listen to your child and ask questions about the activities they take part in

Check it out

A good organisation will welcome questions about their activities and the safety of their surroundings. All organisations should have a Child Protection Policy, including a statement on, and guidelines about, keeping children safe. In addition these are questions you may want to ask:

- Are the staff and volunteers suitable to work with children?
- Is there a written code of behaviour?
- How does the organisation manage staff and volunteers?
- How does the organisation provide for personal care needs?
- Does the organisation have a Health and Safety Policy?
- What are the arrangements when children go on outings?
- You should be told about all the necessary arrangements - including transport to and from - for every outing, no matter how long or short, and you should be asked for your agreement.

Be wary of

- Staff who take charge and operate independently of organisational guidelines.
- Staff who show favouritism or personally reward specific children.
- Staff who encourage inappropriate physical contact.
- Poor communication and lack of parental involvement, leaving you feeling uneasy.
- Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff or volunteers (even to visit their home).
- Remember, listen to your children and ask questions about the activities they take part in.
- Behaviour that encourages rough play, sexual innuendo or embarrassing punishments.

Safe at all times

Parents and carers have a right and a responsibility to ensure that children are safe at all times. Organisations have a responsibility to be open and welcoming and to share information.



**WARNING
SIGNS**

Activities where parents are discouraged from staying to watch or becoming involved. Children who drop out or stop going to an activity for no apparent reason. Behavioural changes.



ACTION

Find out as much information as you can about the organisation - ask other parents. Don't be afraid to ask questions.



WHAT TO SAY

Are the staff/volunteers suitable? What are their policies on child protection? Ask how you will be contacted in an emergency.



PREVENTION

Find out as much as you can before letting your child join an organisation or activity.



CONTACTS

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- www.nspcc.org.uk
0808 800 5000
- www.ofsted.gov.uk
0300 123 1231

Domestic violence

How does it affect children?

“He used to shout at me and be aggressive in front of the kids. He’s getting help now and home life is so much better for us all.”

- Many children witness domestic abuse every year
- Domestic abuse can affect children in serious and long-lasting ways
- Domestic abuse may be a one-off, but it usually gets worse and more frequent over time
- Pregnant women are more vulnerable to domestic abuse
- Children often blame themselves for domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a problem affecting many families. It includes threatening behaviour, violence, psychological, sexual, financial or emotional abuse. This also includes forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so called ‘honour killings’.

Children who see or hear violence can be affected in many different ways. Children do hear, they do see, and they are aware of violence in the family. They will learn how to act from what they see. Violence teaches children negative things about relationships and how to deal with people. It can teach them that violence is the way to sort out arguments. It can cause mistrust of those close to them. Children can think they are somehow to blame for the violence.

It can be difficult to understand why people stay in or return to violent situations. Fear, love, the risk of homelessness and financial issues can make it very difficult for partners with children to leave and some may just not want to.

Short-term effects

Children are affected in many ways by domestic abuse, even after a short time. These effects include feeling frightened, becoming shy and quiet, bedwetting, running away, becoming aggressive, issues with school, poor concentration and emotional upset.

Long-term effects

The longer children are around domestic abuse, the worse the effects on them are. These can include a lack of respect for the non-violent parent or being over protective with them. Loss of self-confidence will affect how they form relationships in the future. A child can feel they have lost the ability to be a child.

If you are worried about domestic abuse, talk to someone. If you are violent and have children, you can seek help to stop.

One Stop Shop

The One Stop Shop is a confidential service for people experiencing domestic violence or abuse in Merton. Mondays from 9.30am-12.30pm at Morden Baptist Church, Crown Lane, Morden, Surrey SM4 5BL.



WARNING SIGNS

Any abuse between adults will negatively affect children. Seek support and help as soon as possible. The longer it lasts the more damaging abuse is.



ACTION

Report your concerns about yourself or someone else to the Police. Talk to them about what is happening.



WHAT TO SAY

Children need to talk about the feelings they have about violence. They need to know it is not their fault and not normal.



PREVENTION

An abusive partner can take responsibility for their actions by seeking help to stop. Make sure that you offer a good role model for children so that they do not think violence is acceptable.



CONTACTS

- 999 in an emergency
- One Stop Shop 020 8685 1637
- Safer Merton 020 8545 4146 www.merton.gov.uk/safermertondomesticviolence
- Community Safety Unit 020 8947 1212
- Victim Support Merton 020 8685 1637
- National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247 www.womensaid.org.uk <http://refuge.org.uk>



Don't shake the baby

Different ways to cope

“*I thought I couldn't manage. He cried all the time, I was exhausted and nothing worked. I felt such a failure. I got so angry with him I felt like shaking him to stop his noise. I had no idea how much that could hurt him.*”

- Shaking is often a response to extreme frustration
- Shaking can cause damage that you cannot see
- Shaking can cause damage that is long lasting
- Never shake a child for any reason
- There are different ways to cope with a crying baby
- Do not suffer alone, seek support from others

Why do people shake babies?

On average a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful.

Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. However there are many alternatives to try and people to talk to.

Some very rough play with a young child can also cause some similar injuries to shaking them. Never shake a young child.

What damage can shaking cause?

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that their head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child's neck muscles are not strong enough to hold their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause

serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce.

Ways to cope with a crying baby

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby.

Some of the ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself to calm down.
- Consider using a dummy.
- Hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby-carrier so that they are close to your body in order to help soothe them.
- Go for a walk or a drive to help them sleep.
- Make use of a helpline in times of crisis.
- If necessary walk out of the room for a short time, ensuring that you are nearby.
- Ask someone else you trust to take over for a while.



WARNING
SIGNS



ACTION



WHAT TO SAY



PREVENTION



CONTACTS

Signs that a child may have been shaken, include feeding difficulties, lethargy, eye injuries, vomiting, irritability, speech and learning difficulties, developmental delay, seizures and paralysis.

If you are worried about your child, take them to see your Doctor, Health Visitor or to the Casualty Department.

Develop communication with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby's needs when they are having difficulties.

It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter or any other carer to be made aware of the dangers.

- Merton Children's Social Care 020 8545 4226/7
- Outside of normal hours 020 8770 5000
- www.parentineplus.org.uk 0808 800 2222
- www.cry-sis.org.uk 08451 228 669
- www.nspcc.org.uk 0808 800 5000



Education

A lifelong experience

“ I didn't do well at school and I don't want that to happen to my kids. I talk to the teachers all the time and I'm learning to read as well. ”

- There are many provisions for young children under the age of five to start learning
- Having a good education will help to give your child the best possible start in life
- Children learn all the time, not just at school
- Give children lots of praise and encouragement

Admissions

Primary years: The Council co-ordinates the admissions for all primary schools for Merton children. Return admissions forms promptly. It is very important that you complete your application form by the published deadline; otherwise you may find that a place is not available in the school of your choice.

Secondary schools: You will need to apply for a secondary school a year in advance. When choosing a secondary school it's important to consider your child's needs, for example what school their friends are going to and the journey involved. You have a right to choose a school regardless of location, but this does not mean that your child will get a place.

Exclusions: Only the headteacher has the power to exclude a pupil. There are two types of exclusion:

- Fixed period exclusion - Usually for a short period. The law allows for exclusion for up to 45 school days in any school year. Schools set work

for an excluded pupil and parents must keep them out of public places. Full-time education must be provided after the sixth day of exclusion.

- Permanent exclusion - The pupil cannot return to the school unless reinstated by the governing body or by an independent appeal panel.

Attendance: Regular attendance at school is important to help children achieve and reach their potential. You are responsible for making sure your child goes to school. If your child cannot attend school for any reason you should contact the school straight away. The Education Welfare Service is there to monitor attendance.

Home education: Parents may choose to educate their children at home if they wish. The local authority will need to be satisfied that a child is receiving suitable education at home, and may ask to talk to the parent and child, and to look at examples of work.

Early years: See the chapter on Starting or changing nursery or school on page 44.



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none; sometimes children are not always able to tell you they are having difficulties at school. Are you sure they are attending?



ACTION

If you have any worries or concerns about your child and their education you need to discuss this with your child's teacher or the headteacher.



WHAT TO SAY

Support your child and let them know how important education, is. Make them feel good about learning.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child goes to school regularly, arrives on time and keeps to the school's rules. Talk to your child and their teacher and let them know who they can talk to if they are having difficulties.



CONTACTS

- Education Welfare Service Merton 020 8545 4021
- www.merton.gov.uk/learning/schools 020 8274 4906
- www.ofsted.gov.uk 0300 123 1231
- www.ace-ed.org.uk 0808 800 5793

E-safety

New technology old problem

“Greg is the same age as me. I haven’t met him but we chat on the internet all the time. He’s really funny. He wants to meet up tomorrow to play football. I can’t wait to see what he’s like.”

- The internet can be fun and is useful
- Have family internet rules to encourage safer use
- Paedophiles have been quick to use the internet to approach children
- It is important that parents understand the internet
- Children can be bullied online and by text messages



The internet is a fantastic way for children to find information, help them learn and keep in contact with friends or meet new ones.

The internet is also an easy tool for child abuse. Paedophiles can use chatrooms and social networking sites to become friendly with children, often by pretending to be another child.

Keep it safe

Keep an eye on what’s going on by keeping the computer in a family room, rather than in a bedroom. Learn how to use a computer, access internet sites and try out a chatroom for yourself so you understand what can happen. Check out which sites your children are visiting to see if they are acceptable. Ensure they save chat logs/emails. Look for sites that have child-friendly advice and how to report concerns.

You can buy software filters which block access to websites with a sexual content. These don’t make internet use totally safe, so take an active interest.

Set ground rules:

- Limit time spent on the internet.
- Talk about age appropriate websites.
- Never give out contact details or post photos of themselves on the internet.
- They should always let you know if someone is asking questions or wanting details they don’t feel happy about giving.
- Ensure social networking profiles are set to private so only friends can view.

Make sure your child understands why there need to be rules. Because they can’t see or hear the people they chat to, they may not be who they seem. Paedophiles gain the trust of children on the internet. Explain that strangers on the internet can be as dangerous as those on the street.

If your child keeps using the computer in secret, if you notice changes in how they act, problems sleeping or changes in routine or they are suddenly asking about sexual matters, you could look into whether their internet-use has anything to do with it.



WARNING SIGNS

Secrecy when using the internet, changes in behaviour, and unusual sexual questions.



ACTION

Set up and stick to your internet-use ground rules. Learn about the internet and how to use it so you can understand what your child is viewing and if it is suitable.



WHAT TO SAY

Discuss the dangers of using the internet and unsuitable websites. Make sure personal information is not passed on to anyone else. If they are worried they must tell you.



PREVENTION

Keep the computer in a family room, with the monitor facing outwards. Discuss which websites your child visits and make them aware of the dangers.



CONTACTS

- School lead on e-safety
- www.ceop.police.uk 0870 000 3344
- www.childnet-int.org 020 7639 6967

Healthy lifestyles

Getting a healthy start

“I encourage my children to be as active as possible. We do a lot of activities as a family which is good for my health too!”

- Eat five fruit and vegetables everyday
- Keep foods such as crisps, fizzy drinks, pies, doughnuts, chocolate and sweets as 'treat' foods, eaten only on special occasions or once a week
- Being healthy yourself sets a good example for your children
- Don't smoke around your children. Even better, quit and improve your health and theirs!
- Healthy teeth are looked-after teeth. Brush your child's teeth every day and give them something to smile about
- Make sure your child is up-to-date with their Immunisations

What they eat

Encourage your children to eat fruit as a snack and include vegetables with their main meal each day; they may have to be offered it more than ten times before they eat it! Children are also more likely to try a new food if they have helped to make or prepare it.

Sit at a table to eat, as a family if possible - setting a good example is one of the best ways of encouraging healthy eating habits early in life.

Carry water with you each day so that your children can always have a drink that is healthy and free!

Exercise

Make exercise a part of your everyday life. Walk to the shops or school, cycle on the weekends or go to the park on the way home, no matter the weather! Limit the amount of time your children watch TV and are on the computer to no longer than two hours each day. Playing sport with your child is another great way to keep fit. Encourage them to be active by being active yourself.

Smoking

If you smoke, you should protect your child from secondhand smoke. This will reduce the risk of them becoming ill.

Teeth

Look after your family's teeth and visit the Dentist regularly. Children should have their first trip to the dentist before they are five. Make sure your child brushes their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Children aged up to seven need help to brush their teeth. Avoid giving children sugary snacks and give tooth-friendly alternatives instead.

Alive 'N' Kicking

Is a free family based programme that provides information and skills needed to make healthier food choices and increase physical activity leading to a healthier lifestyle. Programmes run in various locations in Merton.



WARNING
SIGNS



ACTION



WHAT TO SAY



PREVENTION



CONTACTS

A healthy person should eat a balanced diet, be active, sleep well, have sufficient energy and generally feel that they enjoy life.

Your Health Visitor, School Nurse or Doctor can give you and your family some general advice on healthy eating and exercise.

Explain the importance and long-term benefits of eating healthily and taking regular exercise.

Children learn best by copying adults - setting a good example, such as choosing healthy food options, being active and not smoking will not just make you feel better but help keep your children healthy too.

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- Alive 'N' Kicking 020 8646 7795
- Doctor/Dentist
- Change4Life 0300 123 4567
www.nhs.uk/change4life



Play and learning

Parents have a key role

“*They say you experience second childhood when you get old. I experience it every time I play with my child. I'd forgotten what fun it can be!*”

- Children of all ages learn through play
- Play is a vital part of your child's development
- Early childhood experiences affect children's attitude to learning
- Children need a safe and supportive environment where they can play, learn and develop
- As a parent you have a continuing vital role in your child's play and learning
- Young children do not distinguish between work and play
- Read stories to your child from an early age as part of their play

Playing is a natural way for your child to learn about the world around them. Children learn through play at home, at nurseries and playgroups, with their friends, at school and beyond. Play is a vital part of your child's development and you have an important role to play. Learning to play again with your child can be great fun and bring you closer.

Early learning through everyday experiences - Children who are encouraged to express themselves freely through play tend to be more able to adapt, learn skills and perform better at school. As a parent it's important to spend time playing with your child, providing stimulation and interaction. Involving children in daily activities such as shopping, laying the table or cooking will provide 'real life' opportunities for children to learn.

A helping hand - The Government has established Sure Start to improve the range and quality of services for families with young children up to the age of five. Services and support is provided across the borough,

particularly when it comes to play and learning, in the form of open access sessions.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). All Government-funded playgroups, nurseries, reception classes and other childcare settings carry out The EYFS of education. This is a distinctive phase for children from birth to the end of their year in a school reception class.

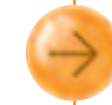
School years - Primary schools recognise the value of play and employ it as a crucial learning tool throughout the school day. At home, your child will begin to play more on their own or with friends, but it is still vital to be involved in your child's play activities.

As they grow older you will need to establish ground rules about playing out and visiting friends. Try to find a way of encouraging your child to get out and interact with others, whilst ensuring that you know where they are and that they are fully aware of dangers and threats to their safety.



WARNING SIGNS

If your child isn't receiving enough stimulation from you or from other carers, they may not be getting the opportunity they need to learn. It could affect their development and future attitude to learning.



ACTION

Make time to have fun playing with your child. Make sure other carers have a positive attitude to play and learning. Find out about playgroups and other play activities.



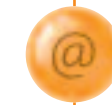
WHAT TO SAY

Just go with the flow. Introduce as many different experiences as you can. Try to discover what sort of play interests your child and play along with them.



PREVENTION

Avoid letting your child get bored. Spend time with young children - keep them stimulated. Try to think up new activities for your child, especially ones for rainy days.



CONTACTS

- Merton Family Information Service 020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
- www.merton.gov.uk/childrenscentres
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk
0808 800 2222



Private fostering

Are you looking after someone else's child?

“My bestfriend's son has just moved in with us. His parent's are overseas so he's really missing them. Hopefully he'll start to feel more at home soon.”

- Private fostering is different from public fostering. Public fostering means that the local authority chooses a foster carer to look after a young person, but private fostering is a private arrangement
- Over half of all private foster carers don't know that they have to tell their local authority that they're a private foster carer
- A Social Worker is required to visit all privately fostered children to check the suitability of the carers and make regular visits to see the child

Sometimes, parents ask another family to look after their children. This is called private fostering. Private fostering of a child is an arrangement that is made privately - that is not involving the council. A private foster carer is someone other than a parent or close relative that takes on the day-to-day care of a child.

Private fostering means that a young person under 16 (or under 18 if they are disabled) is looked after by an adult who isn't a close relative - for example, someone who is not their parent, aunt, uncle, step-parent, grandparent, brother or sister.

What you should do

The law says private foster carers and parents have to tell their council about all private fostering arrangements. It is an offence not to tell the local authority unless you have reasonable cause. If you are a private foster carer or a parent and you are proposing to make a private foster arrangement you must tell your local authority at least six weeks before the arrangement starts. If it is an

emergency arrangement you must tell us immediately. If a child is already living in a private fostering arrangement you must tell us immediately.

What else should you remember?

Before a young person comes to live with you, find out about them from their birth parents - for example, whether they have any medical problems and register the child with your own Doctor.

Also, keep in contact with your foster child's birth parents, so you know where they are living, and they know that their child is okay.

It's not always easy being a foster carer - even if you're good friends with the birth parents, things can still go wrong. That's why you all need to be clear about what you expect from each other.

It can be hard for a young person to live apart from their birth parents or family, and so you will need to give them extra support. It's also important that you treat your foster child the same as your other children.



WARNING SIGNS

Is the child always hungry or tired? Do their clothes smell and look dirty? Are they missing school?



ACTION

If someone has asked you to be a private foster carer, tell your local authority as soon as possible.



WHAT TO SAY

If you know someone who is a private foster carer or the birth parent of a foster child, make sure they know it's important to tell their local authority so that the child stays safe and well.



PREVENTION

If you're thinking about asking someone else to look after your child, be aware of what might happen. You might think you know the private foster carer well, but your local authority has access to Police records so may know things about them that you don't.



CONTACTS

- Merton Access and Assessment Team 020 8545 4226
- British Association for Adoption & Fostering 020 7421 2600 www.baaf.co.uk



Safeguarding your child

Myths and realities

“Social work has changed a lot. We work more in partnership with families where there are concerns to make sure they get support before things reach a crisis.”

- Parents are responsible for their children's safety
- Family Services become involved once concern is shared
- Young people are best cared for by their own families
- Some cultural practices like female genital mutilation or forced marriages are illegal
- Professionals want to work in partnership with families to reduce the risk of harm
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) promotes the welfare of children

When harm happens to young people families also need support. Social Workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need some help. In some cases The Police Child Protection Unit will investigate with Social Workers to help protect children and decide whether an offence has been committed.

1. Child abuse can be recognised, prevented or stopped.

A young person can not always clearly tell you what has happened. A careful assessment is needed as to what support and protection will best help them. A Social Worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effects. All of these factors will help to decide what should happen next. Social Workers and the Police have a duty to investigate concerns of child abuse.

2. Professionals are not solely responsible for protecting children.

Traditionally, Social Workers have been expected to make sure that children are safe. In order to do this well, they rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community who all play an important part in identifying concerns. This helps to ensure support is offered before the situation becomes far worse.

3. Removing a young person from home is not the main aim of social work enquiries and rarely happens.

Social Workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is serious and immediate risk. In emergency situations, the Police have the power to remove a child for 72 hours.



WARNING
SIGNS

Social Workers will get involved when they believe that physical injury, neglect, sexual or emotional abuse has occurred or is likely to occur.



ACTION

Make sure you know what child abuse is and contact the Police or Social Services if you think this is happening. A Social Worker will meet you if abuse is reported.



WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about your own or someone else's child, seek advice about what practical and emotional support is available.



PREVENTION

It is important they know what to do when they feel unsafe. Do they know who to talk to and how to get a safe place or person? If you are worried, seek help early.



CONTACTS

- Merton Safeguarding Children Board 020 8545 4866 www.merton.gov.uk/lscb
- Merton Children's Social Care 020 8545 4226/7
- Outside of normal hours 020 8770 5000
- www.nspcc.org.uk 0808 800 5000
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk 0808 800 2222

Safety in the home

Making your home safe

“Before he was born I never thought about where I left things. Now everything in the house seems dangerous. So I have taken steps to make the house a more child-friendly environment.”

- Babies and children learn by exploring their surroundings
- Babies do not automatically know what is dangerous
- Children need guidance to keep safe at home
- Remove all potential dangers in your home
- Watch your child and remove them from danger
- Explain about safety to your child from an early age

Babies and toddlers learn about their world by exploring it. This means that, as soon as they are able to, they will crawl, touch and grab at whatever is in their line of vision. They are curious by nature and need careful and gentle guidance from a young age about what danger is and what to stay away from. Shouting at, or smacking children will not teach them about safety.

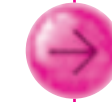
Some dangers around the home:

- Make sure that all medicines and drugs are locked away well out of reach and your use of them is private to avoid your child copying you.
- Certain rooms are necessarily full of danger, such as the kitchen, and should remain out of bounds or made safe by the use of safety devices.
- Are your children contained within the house? Is the safety chain high enough on the front door even for a very active toddler?
- Do not leave windows open and make sure you have safety locks fitted to windows.
- Crawling and exploring are an essential part of development - keep an eye on your young children, especially near wires and sockets and use plug guards.
- Small children should never be left alone with pets. Even trained and good natured animals can be tested when children are around.
- Make sure that irons, saucepans and hot drinks are kept out of the reach of children. Scalding and burns are common and avoidable accidents.
- Inhaling cigarette smoke is bad for children's health. Children will be affected by secondhand smoking and your smoking may encourage them to smoke when they are older.
- Check toys for safety marks. Ensure that your child does not play with toys that are not suitable for their age, especially if the pieces are small enough to choke on. Most accidents happen in the home and this is why it is important to ensure that your home is safe for all your family, especially for young children.



WARNING SIGNS

Spend some time exploring your house as if you were a young child. This will show you the many potential dangers that, if not removed, could harm your child.



ACTION

Make a list of these potential dangers and remove them to safety or protect your child from them by using safety devices.



WHAT TO SAY

With very young children the tone of your voice and facial expressions, alongside explanations, are extremely important. Children will begin to sense the warning tone in your voice over time.



PREVENTION

Keep drugs, syringes, medicines and household chemicals out of reach of children and lock them away safely. Do this before your child is exposed to any hazard.



CONTACTS

- Health Visitor
- www.rospea.com
0121 248 2000
- www.capt.org.uk
020 7608 3828



Safety outside the home

Reducing the risk

“I thought she was right behind me, but when I turned round, I couldn't see her anywhere. I ran through the park calling her name. When I found her I just burst into tears with relief.”

- Remember other homes are not always child-friendly
- Always check a garden or play area is safe and secure before letting your child play
- Keep your child close when shopping. Remind them of 'Stranger danger'
- Children under eight should not be allowed out alone
- Lead by example when using the road. Always hold small children's hands
- Most accidents are preventable

Some experts say there is no such thing as an accident and, according to RoSPA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents), most accidents that happen to young children, such as injuries from falls or drowning, could be avoided with adequate supervision.

If you are visiting friends or relatives, keep a closer eye than usual on your child as their house may not be as child-friendly as yours. Look out for dangerous areas, such as knives sitting on counter tops, drugs such as painkillers left within reach, or open windows. Check that the garden is secure and there is no access to ponds or pools.

Keep your child away from roads and help them to understand the dangers of going near them alone. It's important to always be aware of where your child is when you are out. When shopping, always make sure your child stays close to you - it is easy for them to get lost in a shopping centre or large supermarket. Supervise

playground activities - ensure the playground equipment is suitable for your child's age group, to prevent injury.

In the car, make sure your child is in an age-appropriate car seat and the seat belt is secure. You should also check that the car seat is strapped in properly - many road accident injuries occur due to wrongly strapped seats, which do not restrain the child adequately on impact.

It can be difficult finding the balance between giving your child enough freedom to gain confidence and making sure they are safe. Children under eight should not be allowed out alone. Teach your child road safety from a young age, so it is a habit for them to check for cars before crossing a road. Older children may be trusted to go out for short periods by themselves, but always agree a time for them to return or to phone you. Remind them never to go off with someone they don't know, whatever convincing story they may have.



WARNING
SIGNS

When you are out you may be distracted and not see the signs that your child is at risk of injury. Your child is your responsibility. Keep a close eye on them.



ACTION

When visiting other people, or if you are out, look out for danger areas, such as low walls or broken glass. Always keep your child close to you when shopping.



WHAT TO SAY

Remind your child, whatever their age, to look before crossing a road. Set a good example. Ask them to take sensible precautions if they are old enough to be out by themselves.



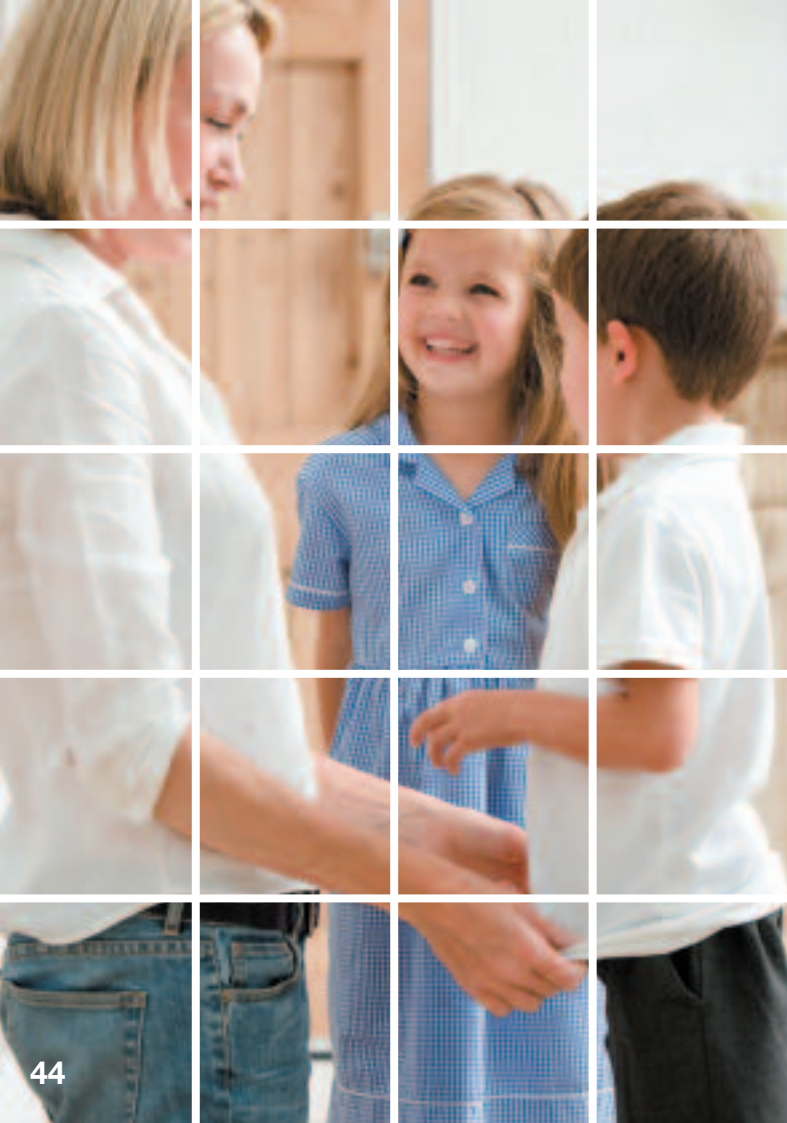
PREVENTION

Most accidents involving children are preventable with adequate care and attention. Never leave a small child unsupervised and keep a close eye on them at all times.



CONTACTS

- www.merton.gov.uk/roadsafety
020 8545 3206/3205
- www.rospace.com
0121 248 2000
- www.capt.org.uk
020 7608 3828



Starting or changing nursery or school

Adapting to change

“When Mia started school it was an exciting time for her - and us, too! She wasn't the only one who had to get used to a whole new routine - there were big changes for the whole family.”

- Starting school can be a huge change for your child
- Start thinking about your child's early learning place well in advance
- Find out as much as you can about their new school
- Preparing to go to secondary school can be a stressful time

Home to nursery

For some children, being in a large group of children can be a scary experience. You can help them by going to a Parent and Toddler Group, by attending other activities where other small children are around, by inviting children from nursery to play, by helping in playgroup or nursery so that you get to know their friends and your child gets used to being with other children. Local Children's Centres are great places to get used to mixing with other children. You also get the chance to chat to other local parents and carers.

Nursery to primary school

When you've decided which schools you are interested in, complete the Starting Primary School Common Application Form. This can either be completed online or on paper. The online system and form will be available from the autumn term a year before your child would start there. Completed applications would need to

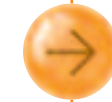
be submitted by the published closing date in January. Late applications will not be considered until after all the on time applications. This may affect your chances of being offered a place at one of your preference schools. You will find out if your child has been accepted in April. If you have not been offered a place at one of your preference schools, you have the right to appeal against this decision.

Give your child lots of support so it's easier for them. Make sure they know what to expect. You might worry how your child is going to cope with being in a new environment. While you probably feel excited for them, maybe you also feel a little sad that your child is growing up and doesn't need you so much any more. It's natural to feel like this sometimes.



WARNING SIGNS

Your child may feel nervous and insecure about the big changes. They may say they feel too ill to go to school, they might be angry towards you or cry, too. These feelings are all quite normal but may mean your child needs extra support.



ACTION

Start thinking about which school you want your child to go to well in advance. Contact your preferred school and arrange a visit.



WHAT TO SAY

If your child feels nervous, talk about how you felt when you started/changed schools. Explain that it's natural to feel like this and they are not alone.



PREVENTION

Be positive about the exciting change. Talk to your child and reassure them about what's going to happen.



CONTACTS

- School Admissions
020 8274 4906
admissions@merton.gov.uk
- Online Application
<https://www.eadmissions.org.uk/eadmissions/app>
- Family Support Worker at Children's Centres
- www.ace-ed.org.uk
0808 800 5793



Worried about a child?

Should you mind your own business?

“Everyday I hear the child next door crying. Her parents are always shouting at her. This is probably none of my business but I am worried and not sure what to do.”

- Protecting children is everybody's business
- Adults have a responsibility to report abuse
- Consider offering some support if you are worried
- If in doubt share your concerns about children
- Reporting concerns rarely leads to a child being removed
- Act now - long-term abuse is damaging for children

When we suspect, witness or are told that a child or young person has been harmed we can react in many different ways. We may feel guilt, anger, disbelief or denial. Some of these reactions can prevent help getting to a family who need it.

All parents experience difficulties at times. But they can be helped by other family members or close friends. If someone you know is having difficulties, you could offer:

- A listening ear.
- Ideas to cope with problems.
- Encouragement to get some help.
- Practical support for example with childcare or shopping.

Many people do not report their concerns because they may:

- Fear that the child or young person will be at further risk of harm.
- Believe that nothing will be done.
- Believe that the child or young person will be taken away from their family.

- Worry that the family may find out who reported them.
- Ruin family relationships.

However there may be times when a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm and professional support is needed. It is best that action is taken early to stop things getting worse. Long-term abuse is much more likely to cause problems for a child or young person as they get older. Even if you think an incident is just a one off, other professional agencies may already have concerns. So your information could be very important.



WARNING
SIGNS

There are many possible signs of abuse, ranging from injury to changes in the way a child is acting. You could see something happen or a child may tell you that they are being hurt.



ACTION

If you think that a child has been hurt, contact the police. If you are unsure, you can speak to a helpline such as the NSPCC and your call will be kept private.



WHAT TO SAY

Explain exactly what you have seen or been told. If you can, keep a note of dates, injuries and the exact words used. These will help you.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child knows who they can share worries with if and when they need to. Listen carefully to children and notice any changes in them.



CONTACTS

- Merton Children's Social Care 020 8545 4226/7 Outside of normal hours 020 8770 5000
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk 0808 800 2222
- www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111
- www.frg.org.uk 0808 801 0366
- www.nspcc.org.uk 0808 800 5000



Young carers

Who cares? You care. They care

“He didn't say anything, but I could tell that having to look after me was having an affect on Jack. But how could I care for my son, when he was caring for me and his baby brother? I made a few phone calls and discovered that even with my illness, I can still be a good parent.”

- Young carers are protected by the Children Act 1989; Carers (Recognition and Services Act) 1995 and carers Disabled Children Act 2000
- The Government, your local Council, and Education and Health Authorities are there to help, once concern is raised
- There are many forms of support to help you and your child cope with their caring responsibilities
- You care about your young carer! So make contact with the support groups and organisations that are out there to help

Many people need special care provided in their homes. They may be ill, disabled or elderly, or they may be experiencing drug or alcohol problems. Receiving care from a member of the family can be one solution. However, when the carer is a child or a young adult, it is especially important to make sure that their needs are properly cared for too.

If your child carries out any caring role, either for yourself or another member of their immediate family, it is essential that their well being does not suffer as a result of their responsibilities. Most importantly, tell your Children's Services Department about your situation. You don't have to cope alone; they can help you and your child get the support and advice you both need.

Education

Naturally you will want your child to do well at school. Whilst many young carers achieve good results, national research has shown that caring can have a negative effect on a child's education. To help prevent this, it is

essential that your local Children's Services Department and your child's school be informed of their caring role. That way they can allow for the needs and pressures that your child may be under and offer sensitive advice and support.

Health

Sometimes young carers can be so busy looking after others, that they forget to look after themselves, and can become ill, stressed or depressed. The best way to avoid this is to get help from your Doctor or School Nurse. Let them know all about your individual situation so that they can provide the help and advice that both you and your child need.

Extra support

Your council can provide extra support for carers. This can include special breaks for carers and additional support services for particular needs. There are also many local and national organisations, specially set up to help young carers and their parents.



**WARNING
SIGNS**

Late homework, absence from school, over-tiredness and behavioural problems may be signs that your child is struggling with their caring role. It is vital that you talk to, and listen to your child and take the action needed to help them cope.



ACTION

Don't think that you and your child have to deal with this situation alone. Get as much information as you can and find out what services, support, benefits and advice is available. You're not alone - make contact!



WHAT TO SAY

Make sure your local Children's Services Department, and your Doctor know about your situation - keep them up to date if things change.



PREVENTION

Being a young carer could have negative effects on your child's health, education and well-being. You can help prevent this by ensuring that they get the best support and advice available.



CONTACTS

- Carers Support, Young Carers project 020 8646 7515 www.csmerton.org
- www.youngcarers.net 0844 800 4361

Adfam
(Alcohol and drugs family support)
020 7553 7640 www.adfam.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)
0808 800 5793 www.ace-ed.org.uk

Al-Anon
020 7403 0888 www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Ask Brook
0808 802 1234 www.brook.org.uk

Barnardo's
www.barnardos.org.uk

Beating Eating Disorders
0845 634 1414 www.b-eat.co.uk

Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT)
020 7608 3828 www.capt.org.uk

ChildLine
0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk

Contact a Family
0808 808 3555 www.cafamily.org.uk

Cry-sis Helpline
08451 228 669 www.cry-sis.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care
0844 477 9400
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Dad Talk
www.dadtalk.co.uk

DrugScope
020 7520 7550
www.drugscope.org.uk

Families Anonymous
0845 1200 660
www.famanon.org.uk

Family Planning Association
0845 122 8690 www.fpa.org.uk

Family Rights Group
0808 801 0366 www.frg.org.uk

FRANK
0800 77 66 00 www.talktofrank.com

Kidscape
08451 205 204
(Parents bullying helpline)
www.kidscape.org.uk

Meet A Mum Association (MAMA)
0845 120 3746 www.mama.co.uk

Missing Persons Helpline
0500 700 700 (24 hours)
www.missingpeople.org.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline
0808 2000 247
www.womensaid.org.uk
<http://refuge.org.uk>

National Childminding Association (NCMA)
0845 880 0044 www.ncma.org.uk

NHS Direct
0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NSPCC
0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

Ofsted
0300 123 1231 www.ofsted.gov.uk

Parentline Plus
0808 800 2222
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Parents for Inclusion
0800 652 3145
www.parentsforinclusion.org

Turning Point
020 7481 7600
www.turning-point.co.uk

YoungMinds
0808 802 5544
www.youngminds.org.uk

Merton Children's Social Care
020 8545 4226/7 (Outside of normal hours 020 8770 5000)
www.merton.gov.uk/childrensservices

Merton Family Information Service
020 8274 5830
fis@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/familyinfo
Supporting Families duty line
020 8646 4038 (9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Integrated Service for Special Educational Needs and Disabled Children
020 8545 4200
www.merton.gov.uk/edspecialneeds

Sutton and Merton NHS
www.suttonandmerton.nhs.uk
020 8251 1111

Merton Mencap
020 8646 0965
info.merton@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk
www.mertonmencap.org.uk

Community Safety Unit
020 8947 1212

Domestic Violence
www.merton.gov.uk/safermerton
domesticviolence
Victim Support Merton
020 8685 1637

Education Welfare Service Merton
020 8545 4021

Merton Schools
020 8274 4906
admissions@merton.gov.uk
www.merton.gov.uk/learning/schools

Carers Support, Young Carers Project
020 8646 7515 www.csmerton.org

Merton Children's Centres
www.merton.gov.uk/childrenscentres

Abbey Children's Centre
Merton Abbey Primary School,
High Path, Merton, London SW19 2JY.
020 8543 4435 or 07940 963656

The Avenue Children's Centre
Joseph Hood Primary School,
Whatley Avenue, London SW20 9NS.
0208 254 4427 or 07985 264 644

The Bridge Children's Centre
Raynes Park Library, Approach Road,
London SW20 8BA. 07956 631238

Church Road Children's Centre
243 Church Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3BH.
020 8274 5851 or 07811 043554

Ivy Gardens Children's Centre
Ivy Gardens, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 1BR.
020 8274 5841 or 07946 172315

Lavender Children's Centre
London Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3LA. 020 8646 7345

Lower Morden Children's Centre
Aragon Primary School, Aragon Road, Morden SM4 4QU.
020 8337 2175

Newminster Children's Centre
Newminster Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 6HJ.
020 8274 5820 or 07852 423875

Steers Mead Children's Centre
Lavender Pavilion, Steers Mead, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HL.
020 8274 5866

Children's Centre at St Mark's
St Mark's Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 2LF. 07957 108113

Every effort has been made to keep the information in this booklet up-to-date and accurate. However, we cannot guarantee that inaccuracies won't occur. Merton Borough Council, its employees or partner agencies won't be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused as a result of reliance on such information.