

Safeguarding children

1.24 Separated Families Policy

Policy statement for St Joseph's Pre-school

The priority of St Joseph's Pre School is for the child of separated parents to be supported by the staff as necessary and for parents to be able to receive and share information about their child in the most appropriate way. With regard to information sharing, this policy differentiates between the resident and non-resident parent. For the purposes of our policy we will define a resident parent as one who has the child living with them for more than 5 nights per week.

At St Joseph's Pre School we recognise that separated parents may find themselves in a difficult situation with regard to maintaining good working relationships with those who care for their children. We understand that the family situation can be complex and difficult for all parties and can sometimes involve legal proceedings. This policy sets out how we will support the family within the setting, including our staff.

All staff, but particularly the key person, will work closely with the parents to build relationships which will support the child's emotional wellbeing and report any significant issues or changes in behaviour to the parents ie. both resident and non-resident parent. Parents will be signposted to relevant services and organisations for support for the whole family. Where possible, practitioners complete training in supporting co-parenting of children who attend the setting, to provide guidance where possible.

Should parents want to discuss a matter with a member of staff other than the child's key person, they should talk to the lead practitioner in the first instance. Separated parents can be given the option of being supported by different members of staff who would communicate between themselves and share any information regarded as pertinent to the child's welfare.

Parent

As a parent you are entitled to be given information about your child and share in decision making to your child's learning.

On registration we will ask the parents if both wish to separately receive information about their child, or if they wish to nominate one parent, normally the resident parent, who will then agree to keep the non-resident parent updated. This decision should be confirmed in writing by both parents and will be kept on your child's record. It can be changed by both parents informing the lead practitioner in writing.

As part of the registration process St Joseph's Pre School will ask for parents to agree who is to be the parent who is contacted in the first instance if staff need to communicate with a parent. The other parent will be asked to give written consent to this.

Parental Responsibility

While the law does not define in detail what parental responsibility is, the following list sets out some of the key features of someone holding parental responsibility. These include:

- providing a home for the child;
- having contact with and living with the child;
- protecting and maintaining the child;
- disciplining the child;
- choosing and providing for the child's education;
- determining the religion of the child;
- agreeing to the child's medical treatment;
- naming the child and agreeing to any change of the child's name;
- accompanying the child outside the UK and agreeing to the child's emigration, should the issue arise;
- being responsible for the child's property;
- appointing a guardian for the child, if necessary; and
- allowing confidential information about the child to be disclosed.

If the parents of a child are married to each other at the time of the birth, or if they have jointly adopted a child, then they both have parental responsibility. Parents do not lose parental responsibility if they divorce and this applies to both the resident and the non-resident parent.

This is not automatically the case for unmarried parents. According to current law, a mother always has parental responsibility for her child. However, a father has this responsibility only if he is married to the mother when the child is born or has acquired legal responsibility for his child through one of these three routes:

- by jointly registering the birth of the child with the mother (from December 2003);
- by a parental responsibility agreement with the mother; and
- by a parental responsibility order made by a court.

Other adults can obtain parental responsibility for a child for example via a Child Arrangements Order or by application of a step parent or guardian.

Registration Process

During the registration process we collect details about both parents including who has parental responsibility and the usual pattern of where the child resides during the week.

We request these details on the child on the child registration form. If a parent does not have parental responsibility or has a court order in place to prevent this we must have a copy of this document for the child's records. We also need to be informed in writing if another person holds parental responsibility.

If a child is registered by one parent of a separated family we request disclosure of all relevant details relating to the child and other parent such as parental responsibility, court orders or injunctions. This will make sure we can support the child and family fully in accordance with the policy set out below, including offering the other parent the opportunity to complete a set of registration forms.

We will:

- Ensure the child's welfare is paramount at all times they are in our care.
- Comply with any details of agreements between parents and/or court orders where applicable to the child's attendance at St Joseph's Pre School where we have seen a copy/have a copy attached to the child's file.
- Provide information on the child's progress e.g learning journeys, progress checks within the setting, to both parents, or to the nominated parent, provided there is no Order to the contrary of which we have been advised.
- Invite both parents to St Joseph's Pre School events, including parental consultations and social events provided there is no Order to the contrary of which we have been advised.
- Ensure any incident or accident within St Joseph's Pre School relating to the child is reported to the person collecting the child.
- Ensure that all matters known by the staff pertaining to the family and the parents' separation remain confidential
- Ensure that no members of staff takes sides regarding any separation and treats both parents equally and with due respect.
- Not restrict access to any parent or person with parental responsibility unless a formal court order is in place. We respectfully ask that parents do not put us in this position.

We ask parents to:

- Provide us with all information relating to parental responsibilities, court orders and injunctions.
- Update information that changes any of the above as soon as practicably possible by advising the lead practitioner via a letter or email from both parents or from the resident parent if the lead practitioner deems this to be applicable.
- Work with us to ensure continuity of care and support for the child.
- Not involve St Joseph's Pre School staff in any family disputes, unless this directly impacts on the care we provide for the child.
- Talk to the lead practitioner/key person away from the child when this relates to family separation in order to avoid the child becoming upset. This can be arranged as a more formal meeting or as an informal chat.
- Not ask St Joseph's Pre School to take sides in any dispute. We will only take the side of your child and this will require us to be neutral at all times.

Associated policies and procedures

- No 4.6 Parental involvement

Version Number	Author	Purpose of change	Date
1.0	E Kemp	New Policy to reflect changes in families	Jan 2018
2.0	K Coupe	Reviewed, typos corrected and version controlled	10/07/2019 AGM
3.0	K Coupe & N Powers	Inclusion of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “associated policies and procedures” section as per EY Safeguarding Audit s175/157 2023; and • additional sentence concerning support by practitioners 	17/07/2023 Chair (A Hitchings)