

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

GIRFEC Q&A for parents and families

What is GIRFEC?

GIRFEC stands for 'Getting It Right For Every Child'. It is the Scottish Government-led approach to making sure that our children and young people – and their parents or carers – can get all the help and support they need from birth right through to age 18.

Our children and young people have the right to be *safe* and *healthy*. They should also be *respected* and *included*, *nurtured* and *responsible*. And they should get all the encouragement they need to be *active*, and to *achieve* things in their lives. The GIRFEC approach aims to realise these rights.

We know that the wellbeing of children and young people is a priority for parents and families, as it is for the Scottish Government, for teachers, health visitors and others who provide children's services in Scotland. That's why all the main public sector bodies in Scotland are behind the GIRFEC approach to supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

The vast majority of Scotland's children and young people get the love and support they need from within their families and their wider, local communities. But even the most loving and caring families can sometimes need extra support. The GIRFEC approach aims to make it as easy as possible for any child or young person (and their parents) to get that help or support if they need it.

The idea is to give them a named individual, a single point of contact who has a responsibility to provide help and support when asked, and can draw together other services if needed, bringing help to the child or parents rather than them having to feel passed around from one service to another.

This 'single point of contact' is called the Named Person – and they will be a professional, someone who usually already knows the child, and is in a good position to offer advice, or draw in other professional support if needed.

What do you mean by 'wellbeing'?

The wellbeing of children and young people is at the heart of the GIRFEC approach. Wellbeing is about how things are going for children in their lives. The GIRFEC approach uses eight words to describe what it looks like when things are going well – in other words whether a child is:

- Safe
- Healthy
- Achieving
- Nurtured
- Active
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included

The words can be used to find out where a child's strengths lie and also, if there are concerns, to see where some advice, help or support might be needed.

These eight words help everyone to understand wellbeing in the same way, and use the same language to talk about it. You can expect to hear *wellbeing* referred to when your child's health visitor or school contacts you.

And while mums, dads, carers, grandparents and the wider family are there to provide love and support, sometimes children – or those looking after them – might need a bit of extra help with something, or advice and reassurance that they are doing the right things.

Why would I need a Named Person?

You and your child will soon have the right to support from a Named Person if you need it.

The Named Person will be a service that health boards, local authorities and others will be legally required to *offer* every child and young person up to the age of 18, or beyond if they are still in school.

The idea is that every child or their parents will have someone to go to if they need help with a particular issue. This can be any concern – for example, sleep difficulties, exam anxiety, bullying, or anything that might be having an impact on a child's wellbeing.

There is *no* obligation on parents or children to approach the Named Person service. The Named Person is also there to act as a single point of contact if another professional has a concern about a child's wellbeing. This means there may be occasions when the Named Person would need to discuss a child or young person's wellbeing with other professionals. Typically they should do this with the agreement and knowledge of the child and/or their parents or carers.

The GIRFEC approach was tested in Highland from 2007. It was parents and children there who suggested the idea of the Named Person. They felt that a professional person like a teacher or health visitor was well-placed to act as a single point of contact for families and help them access services more easily if they needed to. Families said they did not like having to repeat their story to lots of different professionals, or feeling as if they were being passed from pillar to post – especially at times when they were perhaps feeling vulnerable or overwhelmed.

The Named Person will be able to call on a range of other professionals to coordinate support that is tailored to your child, if they need it. This means there would always be one person who sees the whole picture of what is going on in a child's life, particularly where that child and their family could use some additional support. An isolated incident might be just that – but it could also add up to a more serious concern if there have been other incidents.

The idea is to try and address any concerns early on to prevent them escalating. This is known as 'early intervention' and evidence suggests that it is better for children's wellbeing, reduces the risk of long-term problems and also helps to avoid crisis situations.

Your child may never need the Named Person service but we want to make sure there is someone there for you and your family if you ever do.

A bereavement, relationship break up or a health problem can have a major impact on a child's wellbeing (as of course it can for adults, too).

www.wellbeingforyoungscots.org/about/winners/dionne

Every child and young person's life and circumstances are unique and this approach to their wellbeing aims to reflect that.

What will the Named Person do that a health visitor or teacher doesn't already do? What are the benefits?

Many teachers and health visitors are already doing much of what a Named Person will do. They are considering a child's whole wellbeing and asking themselves what they can do to support the child if something is getting in the way of their wellbeing. They are drawing in support from other professional services where appropriate, and making sure the child and their parents are at the centre of any discussions. They are thinking about what information it might be helpful to share and they are discussing this with the child or parents (unless there are more immediate child protection issues). We want to make sure this is being done consistently across Scotland, with good guidance and training for professionals to make sure they understand what they can do to promote, support and safeguard your child's wellbeing.

However it can often be difficult for the health visitor or guidance teacher to call on help from other services, and there can be barriers to good cooperation to support families. For this reason, when the law comes into effect (planned for August 2016) it will require other key services to support the Named Person, and all services will be expected to work together to make sure children get the right help at the right time. The Named Person will be central to making the system work.

Parents know their child well and typically support their child's wellbeing through everything they do. When considering the child's wellbeing the Named Person should work with and involve parents as far as possible, identifying any extra support for the child.

Your child may have a good relationship with another professional, perhaps a youth worker or the family GP. Other professionals will know about the Named Person service and in some cases, if they are concerned about a child's wellbeing, would be encouraged to share relevant information with them.

There may be times when the Named Person notices that something has changed in your child's behaviour. (For example, a child who normally seems quite happy at school suddenly becomes withdrawn.) In a case like this, the Named Person would check with the child and would typically get in touch with the parents to make sure everything was OK.

Your Named Person is there to help you and your child if you need them.

Who will my child's Named Person be and how do I contact them?

If your child has not yet started school, their Named Person is most likely to be the health visitor. Once they are at school, it will be a professional at school – a guidance teacher, head or depute head.

Some groups of children – like children who are home-schooled, and those who leave school before their 18th birthday – would have different arrangements in place

When the law comes into effect (planned for August 2016) your local health service or local authority will have a legal duty to tell you who your child's Named Person is, and how you can contact them.

If your child attends an independent school, the school will put the Named Person in place and will tell you how to contact them.

What happens if my child's health visitor or teacher is not able to help my child?

The Named Person is not expected to take on the roles of other specialist professionals. If they can't offer direct help they will put you or your child in touch with someone who can. Parents and children should have to spend less time on the often frustrating task of trying to access services themselves. In the GIRFEC approach, public service organisations are required to work together, making sure the child comes first.

Your child may already have a trusted relationship with another adult like a GP and they would continue to be the main source of support and advice. In some cases they will make you and your child aware that they might share information with the Named Person if they think it is likely to be relevant in promoting, supporting or safeguarding your child's wellbeing.

What if I do not want anything to do with the Named Person?

The Named Person service is there for your child – and you – if you need it.

Often children and young people will need a little extra help or support at some point in their childhood, but it is impossible to predict what they will need and when. Parents and young people tell us that when they need a little extra help it is often difficult to know who to turn to for advice and the support to access help quickly – this is the role of the Named Person and why the service is available for every child.

It is up to you whether or not you approach the Named Person. We believe it offers real benefits to children, young people and their parents and we want to encourage everyone to recognise that it is OK to sometimes ask for a bit of extra help when needed and to know where to get it.

Others who know the child, or family may raise a concern about the child's wellbeing with the Named Person. In that case the Named Person will typically contact the parents to discuss the issue and agree how best to act to support the child. In some cases no action may be required by the Named Person, but in others the Named Person may offer advice or seek support from another service.

If anyone (the Named Person, or anyone else) has concerns about a child's safety, and think that they may be at risk of abuse and neglect, that person would be expected to follow child protection procedures and contact social work or the police. *This is what already happens in Scotland and will not change with the introduction of the Named Person service.*

[Find out more about child protection](#)

Home educated children

GIRFEC says that every child and young person in Scotland has the right to access the Named Person service. That includes children who are being home educated and other groups, too.

How will home educated children access their Named Person?

For children from birth up to school age, the Named Person is likely to be their health visitor – someone who should already be known to the family. Once a child reaches school age, it will be up to local authorities to assign a Named Person to children who are being educated at home. Parents and children will be informed by the health board or local authority, how to contact their Named Person.

If the child wanted advice or assistance, they would have the right to contact their Named Person or they could ask a parent, or another adult with whom they have a close relationship to do so. For example, a home educated child might have a closer relationship with the family GP. In such a case, if a wellbeing concern came up which the GP could not address, the GP could discuss with the child sharing relevant information with the Named Person, who would be in a position to provide the support, or could contact another service which could provide the support.

What might a home educating child or parent use the Named Person service for?

The Named Person could help a home educated child to get some services that might be easier to access if your child is in school. These might include bereavement counselling services or speech and language therapy.

