



Separated Family Policy

September 2026- September 2027

1. Introduction

1.1 At Acorn Childcare Centre, we recognise that family separation can be a difficult and emotional time for children, parents and carers.

1.2 We are committed to supporting children through changes in their family circumstances and will work respectfully and sensitively with parents and carers to establish the most effective arrangements for the child's care, wellbeing, learning and development.

1.3 Our primary consideration will always be the child's safety, welfare and best interests.

1.4 We recognise that families have different structures and arrangements. These may include separated or divorced parents, unmarried parents, blended or step-families, children cared for by relatives, foster carers, special guardians or other adults.

1.5 We will not make assumptions about a person's role in a child's life based on their family circumstances or whether they live with the child.

1.6 Where appropriate, parents and carers will be signposted to relevant services and organisations that can provide support for the whole family.

2. Parental responsibility

2.1 Parental responsibility means the legal rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority a person has in relation to a child and their upbringing.

2.2 More than one person can have parental responsibility for a child. Separation or divorce does not, in itself, remove parental responsibility.

2.3 The circumstances in which a person has parental responsibility depend on the individual circumstances of the child. This can include being a child's parent, being married to or in a civil partnership with a parent in certain circumstances, jointly registering a birth, entering into a parental responsibility agreement, or obtaining parental responsibility through a court order. Other legal arrangements may apply, including adoption, guardianship, special guardianship, surrogacy and care arrangements.

2.4 Parental responsibility does not, by itself, determine where a child lives or the arrangements for spending time with a parent. These matters may be addressed separately through family arrangements or court orders.

2.5 The nursery will not make assumptions about parental responsibility based solely on whether a parent or carer lives with the child.

2.6 Parents and carers must provide the nursery with relevant information about parental responsibility and any court orders, injunctions or other legal arrangements that affect the child's care, collection, contact or information sharing.

2.7 Where there is uncertainty about parental responsibility or the effect of a legal order, the nursery will seek appropriate advice rather than attempting to resolve the legal dispute itself.

3. Different family arrangements

3.1 Acorn Childcare Centre recognises and respects different types of family arrangements.

3.2 We will work in partnership with parents and carers and will aim to ensure that children experience consistency, stability and emotional support during periods of family change.

3.3 Where parents or carers disagree about arrangements for a child, the nursery will remain neutral and will not become involved in disputes between adults.

3.4 The nursery's responsibility is to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and to provide appropriate care, learning and support.

3.5 Where family circumstances raise a safeguarding concern, staff will follow the nursery's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and seek advice from the appropriate safeguarding professionals.

4. Nursery registration

4.1 During the registration process, we collect the names and contact details of all parents and/or carers known to the nursery, together with information about parental responsibility and any relevant legal arrangements.

4.2 Parents and carers are asked to provide accurate and up-to-date information about:

- who has parental responsibility for the child;
- who the child lives with;
- who is authorised to collect the child;
- relevant emergency contacts;
- any court orders, injunctions or other legal arrangements affecting the child;

- any safeguarding information that may affect the child's care, collection or wellbeing; and
- any other information that the nursery reasonably needs in order to safeguard and care for the child.

4.3 If a parent or carer provides the nursery with a court order, injunction or other relevant legal document, a copy will be retained securely within the child's records where appropriate.

4.4 If a child is registered by one parent or carer in circumstances where the family is separated, the nursery will request relevant information about the other parent or carer and any legal arrangements that affect the child.

4.5 Parents and carers are expected to inform the nursery promptly of any changes to these arrangements.

5. Court orders and legal arrangements

5.1 The nursery will comply with any relevant court order or legal direction that has been provided to us.

5.2 Parents and carers must provide the nursery with copies of relevant orders or other legal documentation and inform us when these arrangements change.

5.3 The nursery will not attempt to interpret or enforce private family arrangements that have not been formally communicated to us.

5.4 Where there is uncertainty, disagreement or conflicting information about a court order or other legal arrangement, the nursery will seek appropriate advice from the relevant local authority, safeguarding professionals or legal adviser.

5.5 Where there is an immediate safeguarding concern, the nursery will act in accordance with its safeguarding procedures.

6. We will

- Ensure the child's safety, welfare and best interests remain central to all decisions.
- Treat parents and carers fairly, respectfully and without discrimination.
- Remain neutral in disputes between adults.
- Work with parents and carers to support continuity of care and emotional wellbeing for the child.
- Take reasonable steps to understand the child's family arrangements and any relevant legal orders.
- Keep relevant information about family circumstances confidential and secure, subject to legal and safeguarding requirements.
- Follow any relevant court order or legal direction that has been provided to the nursery.

- Share appropriate information about the child's care, learning, development and progress with parents and/or carers in accordance with their legal rights, the EYFS, data protection requirements, safeguarding responsibilities and any relevant court order.
- Provide appropriate opportunities for parents and carers to engage with their child's learning and development, where this is consistent with the child's welfare and any relevant legal arrangements.
- Invite relevant parents and carers to nursery events and consultations where appropriate, taking account of the child's welfare, legal arrangements and any safeguarding considerations.
- Record and report accidents and incidents in accordance with the nursery's normal procedures and relevant legal or safeguarding requirements.
- Ensure that staff do not take sides in parental disputes.
- Ensure staff do not discuss one parent's circumstances with another parent unless there is an appropriate reason and the information can lawfully be shared.
- Seek appropriate professional advice where there is uncertainty about parental responsibility, access, collection arrangements, information sharing or the effect of a court order.
- Follow the nursery's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy where family circumstances give rise to a safeguarding concern.
- Signpost parents and carers to appropriate support services where this would benefit the child or family.

7. Access to information

7.1 The nursery recognises that parents and carers may have legal rights to information about their child even where they do not live with the child.

7.2 Information will be shared in accordance with the person's legal rights, the EYFS, data protection requirements, safeguarding responsibilities and any relevant court order.

7.3 The nursery will not automatically withhold information simply because a parent does not live with the child.

7.4 Equally, parental responsibility does not mean that every request for information must automatically be met. The nursery will consider the nature of the information requested, the person's legal rights, the child's welfare, data protection requirements, safeguarding considerations and any relevant court order.

7.5 Where there is uncertainty, the nursery will seek appropriate advice.

8. Collection and contact arrangements

8.1 Parents and carers must provide the nursery with clear information about who is authorised to collect the child.

8.2 The nursery will follow its normal collection and safeguarding procedures and any relevant court order or legal direction that has been provided to us.

8.3 The nursery will not make decisions about where a child should live or which parent they should spend time with.

8.4 Where parents disagree about collection or contact arrangements, the nursery will not attempt to resolve the family dispute.

8.5 If there is uncertainty about whether an individual should collect a child, or if a safeguarding concern arises, the nursery will follow its safeguarding and collection procedures and seek appropriate advice.

8.6 The child's safety and welfare will remain the nursery's primary consideration.

9. Confidentiality and information sharing

9.1 Information relating to a child and their family will be treated sensitively and kept confidential and secure in accordance with data protection requirements, the nursery's confidentiality procedures and safeguarding responsibilities.

9.2 Information will only be shared with people who have a lawful right to receive it or where there is an appropriate professional, legal or safeguarding reason for sharing it.

9.3 Confidentiality will not prevent the nursery from sharing information where this is necessary to safeguard or promote a child's welfare, where there is a legal requirement to do so, or where information is required by an appropriate professional or authority.

9.4 Staff must not discuss family disputes or confidential family information with other parents or with people who do not have an appropriate reason to receive the information.

10. Supporting the child

10.1 Children may respond to family separation in different ways. Staff will provide children with appropriate emotional support and will observe for any significant changes in behaviour, presentation or wellbeing.

10.2 Where appropriate, significant changes will be discussed with the relevant parent and/or carer in accordance with the nursery's information-sharing and safeguarding procedures.

10.3 Staff will not question children about family disputes or encourage them to take sides.

10.4 The nursery will provide a safe and supportive environment where children can express their feelings appropriately.

10.5 Where a child's needs indicate that additional support may be beneficial, the nursery may discuss appropriate services or sources of support with the parent or carer.

11. Working with parents and carers

11.1 We ask parents and carers to:

- Provide the nursery with accurate information about parental responsibility, family arrangements and relevant court orders.
- Inform the nursery as soon as reasonably practicable about any changes to these arrangements.
- Provide copies of relevant legal documentation where this affects the child's care, collection, contact or information sharing.
- Work with the nursery to provide continuity and consistency of care for the child.
- Respect the nursery's responsibility to remain neutral in disputes between adults.
- Not ask nursery staff to take sides or become involved in family disputes.
- Not use nursery staff to pass messages between parents unless this has been specifically agreed as appropriate by the nursery.
- Not discuss family disputes in front of the child at the nursery.
- Speak to the manager and/or key person privately when discussing sensitive matters relating to family separation. This can be arranged as a formal meeting or informal discussion.
- Provide the nursery with any information that may affect the child's safety or wellbeing.
- Understand that the nursery may need to seek professional advice where there is uncertainty about legal or safeguarding matters.

12. Safeguarding

12.1 Where separation, parental conflict, domestic abuse, coercive control or other family circumstances give rise to a concern about a child's safety or welfare, the nursery will follow its Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

12.2 Staff will not attempt to investigate family disputes themselves.

12.3 Where appropriate, concerns will be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and referred to the relevant safeguarding professionals or agencies in accordance with the nursery's safeguarding procedures.

12.4 Information may be shared without parental consent where this is necessary and lawful to safeguard a child.

13. Professional advice

13.1 The nursery recognises that family law can be complex and that every family situation is different.

13.2 Where necessary, the nursery may seek advice from:

- the local authority;
- the local safeguarding partnership or relevant safeguarding professionals;
- children's social care;
- the nursery's legal adviser;
- other appropriate professional or statutory services.

13.3 The nursery will not provide parents or carers with legal advice or attempt to determine the outcome of family law disputes.

13.4 Parents and carers who require legal advice should seek advice from an appropriately qualified legal professional.

14. Neutrality

14.1 Acorn Childcare Centre will remain neutral in disputes between adults.

14.2 Staff will not take sides or express personal opinions about family disputes.

14.3 Our decisions and actions will be guided by the child's safety, welfare, best interests and individual needs, together with our legal and safeguarding responsibilities.

14.4 We ask parents and carers not to place staff in a position where they are expected to support one parent's position against another.

15. Related policies

15.1 This policy should be read alongside the nursery's:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Confidentiality and Information Sharing Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Admissions and Registration Policy
- Collection of Children Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Inclusion Policy

This policy was adopted on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Date for review
<i>September 2026 Reviewed September 2026 - SB</i>	<i>Sarah Blades</i>	<i>September 2027</i>