

## 7-minute briefing

### Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs)

For frontline professionals working with infants, children, young people and families



This 7-Minute Briefing has been developed in response to valuable feedback from our recent workforce survey, which highlighted areas where staff would welcome greater clarity and confidence around Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs).

It aims to provide a clear, shared understanding of the purpose of CSOs, the legal grounds, and what they mean for how we support infants, children, young people and their families in a trauma-informed, child and family-centred way. This briefing is intended as a practical overview for frontline staff.

More detailed information about CSOs and the Children's Hearings System can be found here:

<https://www.scra.gov.uk/>

#### 1. Purpose of a Compulsory Supervision Order – why CSOs exist

A Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) exists to make sure an infant, child or young person gets the help, protection and support they need when worries about their safety or wellbeing cannot be addressed without legal measures. The general wording used by SCRA (Scottish Children's Reporter Administration) has always been the child's need for protection, guidance, treatment or control and to safeguard and promote their welfare

A CSO is used to:

- Protect children from harm or significant risk
- Make sure support actually happens, not just that it is offered
- Provide clarity and stability when many services are involved
- Put the child's needs firmly at the centre of planning and decision-making

A CSO is not a punishment.

It is a protective and supportive tool, designed to help children grow up safe, supported and with the best possible life chances.

## 2. Grounds for a CSO – what leads to one being agreed

A CSO is only made when grounds are accepted at a hearing or established at court **and** the hearing decide that a CSO is necessary for the protection, guidance, treatment or control of the child.

Examples include concerns about:

- Neglect, abuse or lack of appropriate care
- Risk of harm linked to a child's environment or relationships
- A child's behaviour placing them or others at risk
- A child not receiving the guidance, protection or support they need

For practice, it's important to remember:

- Grounds explain why help is needed, not who is to blame
- Many families involved are managing complex trauma, stress, poverty or loss
- A CSO exists because support is needed, not because families have failed

What if grounds are not accepted?

If a child or their family does not agree with the grounds, the case may either be discharged or referred to the Sheriff for proof.

Where the case is referred, it is the Sheriff's role to independently determine whether the grounds are established in fact, based on the evidence. This reflects an important safeguard within the system: decisions about whether grounds are proven are a matter for the court, not the Children's Hearing. This separation of roles helps ensure that decisions are fair, lawful and respect the rights of children and families

While this process is underway, interim measures may be put in place if needed to keep the child safe

## 3. What being on a CSO means for babies, children and young people

Any infant, child or young person on a CSO is legally looked after, even if they live at home with their family.

This means:

- Services have clear legal duties to support the child
- Planning should prioritise safety, stability and emotional wellbeing
- Decisions should always consider the child's age, stage and lived experience

For infants:

- Focus is on safety, attachment and early development

For children:

- Support should reduce chaos and help build predictable, nurturing routines

For young people:

- Support should balance protection with participation and growing independence

Across all ages, a CSO should help a child experience less stress, not more.

#### 4. Important changes under the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

Recent changes in law strengthen the care-focused role of CSOs, particularly for children involved in justice processes.

Key changes frontline staff should be aware of:

- Children should not be placed in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs)  
Children involved in offending behaviour should be cared for in welfare-based settings, such as secure care, not custodial environments.
- Children in secure care through justice routes are treated as looked after  
This reinforces that these children need care, protection and support, not punishment.
- Greater focus on wellbeing and rights in justice decisions  
Decision-making must take account of children's developmental needs, trauma and rights.
- Stronger expectation of multi-agency responsibility  
Children involved in both care and justice systems should experience joined-up, compassionate support, not fragmented responses.

For frontline practice, this means:

- Children involved in offending behaviour are still children first
- CSOs remain a key tool for supporting safety, structure and change
- Responses should focus on helping behaviour change by reducing harm and stress

#### 5. What this means for how we support families

Families involved in the Children's Hearing System may feel frightened, blamed or overwhelmed.

Trauma-informed, family-centred practice means:

- Explaining concerns and decisions clearly and respectfully
- Being honest without being judgemental
- Recognising family strengths as well as risks
- Supporting families to stay involved where it is safe to do so

How we communicate and relate to families can:

- Build trust and engagement
- Or unintentionally increase fear, resistance or withdrawal

CSOs work best when families experience professionals as helpers, not enforcers.

## 6. Everyone's role – not just social work

Social work usually coordinates the CSO, but frontline professionals across all services play a vital role.

Your contribution might include:

- Offering day-to-day stability and emotional support
- Building safe, trusting relationships with children
- Noticing changes in wellbeing, behaviour or safety
- Sharing information early – especially emerging concerns or improvements

Important reminder:

- Support linked to a CSO is a legal duty, not optional
- Small, consistent actions can significantly affect how safe a child feels

## 7. What next – key take-aways for frontline professionals

- Know which children you work with are supported through a CSO
- Understand that this creates legal responsibilities for services
- Tailor your support to prioritise safety, consistency and relationships
- Share concerns or progress early, not just at review points
- Keep the child's lived experience and rights at the centre

If you're unsure:

- Ask how your role links to the CSO
- Speak with the lead professional
- Seek clarity early – questions are a strength, not a weakness

CSOs work best when children feel safe, families feel supported, and professionals work together with compassion and purpose

### **Review and appeal**

Review and appeal processes are in place to ensure decisions remain fair and appropriate over time. Social work can request a case is brought back to a Children's Hearing at any time if circumstances change. Children, families and relevant persons can usually request a review after three months (or sooner if there has been a significant change in circumstances). Children and families also have the right to appeal certain decisions to the Sheriff, providing an important additional safeguard.

