

Pathways for Children with Serious Behavioural or Substance Abuse Issues

Type: [Parliamentary Questions](#)

Topic(s): [Rehabilitation](#), [Residential & Shelter Support](#), [Children & Families](#)

Published on 07 October 2026

Ms Yeo Wan Ling asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) whether there is an expedited pathway for children below the age of 16 with serious behavioural or substance abuse issues to receive structured residential intervention where community-based interventions have repeatedly failed; and (b) how will the Ministry coordinate with other agencies to ensure there are no gaps in supervision, care and rehabilitation.

Serious Family Guidance Order cases for under-16s can go straight to the Youth Court

Description

Parents of a child under 16 with serious behavioural problems can have a Family Guidance Order (FGO) case fast-tracked to the Youth Court, without first attending a community programme, when the child poses a safety or moral risk or has seriously hurt a family member. The pathway is set out in a [Ministry of Social and Family Development written parliamentary reply](#) on 7 October.

The reply answered Ms Yeo Wan Ling, who asked whether children under 16 can get structured residential help quickly when community programmes have failed again and again.

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Ms Yeo Wan Ling asked the Minister for Social and Family Development for the pathway for children below the age of 16 with serious behavioural or substance use issues who require residential intervention where community-based interventions have been exhausted. She also asked how the Ministry will coordinate with other agencies to ensure there are no gaps in supervision and support.

The reply was published on 7 October 2026. Photo: Ministry of Social and Family Development

When a case skips the queue

In a serious FGO case, the family does not have to attend a pre-FGO intervention in the community first. The Youth Court may then order the child into a residential home if it finds the child needs a structured and secure environment.

Community-based help stays the first option for most families. It keeps a child at home with the family, in school and connected to the neighbourhood, while still giving structured supervision and support.

How an FGO normally starts

An FGO is meant as a last resort. Before applying, parents are encouraged to talk to the child's teachers and principal, seek counselling for themselves and the child through the school, a Family Service Centre or another social service agency, and get psychological or psychiatric advice where needed.

- Parents submit the [pre-FGO application form](#) online.
- An appointed agency contacts them within two working days to set up a screening interview.

- The agency may refer the family to a family programme, after which parents decide whether to go ahead with the FGO application.
- If the child refuses to attend the programme, the agency arranges an appointment for the parents to apply in court.

Once an FGO application is filed in the Youth Courts, it can only be withdrawn with the court's consent.

Etomidate and the Youth Homes

Children under 16 who keep abusing etomidate after community-based rehabilitation may be prosecuted in the Youth Court. The court can then order them into residential rehabilitation at the MSF Youth Homes.

Where families can start

The range of programmes and agencies can be hard for parents to navigate. Families who need help can go to their nearest Family Service Centre, which assesses what they need and refers them to the right support.

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