

# Middlesbrough Fostering Service

## Foster Carer's Handbook





## Introduction

Welcome to our new Foster Care Handbook.

It has been developed to include comprehensive information on Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service.

It contains useful material that we hope you will find useful in your role as Foster Carers and to help you deliver the highest quality of care to the children and young people in your care.

An 'A to Z' of Good Practice in Fostering has been written to go hand-in-hand with this handbook and lists further information and guidance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susie Turner'.

Susie Turner

Service Manager  
Fostering and Family Placement Service

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## Our Mission

Our mission is simple: To show Middlesbrough Children that they matter.

Here are the 10 priorities for our work that helps us fulfil our mission.

### **Place - Making Middlesbrough a place that children are proud to live in.**

We believe that our future and our town are dependent on our children and that their success relies on the support we provide them now to fulfil their potential and become leaders in the future. Our aim is to increase the life chances of young people by encouraging their ambitions and providing the learning and work opportunities that will help them build happy and healthy futures.

### **Work - Providing services that are fit for the children who will grow to serve Middlesbrough.**

We understand that young people in Middlesbrough are a part of our present and 100% of our future. We will work with local businesses to develop opportunities for the young people of Middlesbrough to ensure our town will have a thriving future. We value our workforce's varied experience and different abilities, and this reflects the diversity of the families we work with.

### **Family and Relationships - Seeing children and families as collaborators and not as clients.**

We will provide children and families with the support and knowledge they need to be healthy and happy, starting with their basic needs, ensuring they have access to the right nutrition, a safe environment and appropriate services. We value childhood and dedicate time to create and promote experiences that enable children to have the childhood all children deserve.

### **Community - Making Middlesbrough a community that children are proud to belong to.**

Middlesbrough is abundant in pride, drive and determination to succeed beyond stigma or stereotypes: this is what creates our community. We recognise the importance of self-worth and our focus is to provide an environment where children grow up around people who inspire them to love themselves, be the best they can be and strive for their own ambitions.

**People - Understanding our role is more than visiting children because we have to; we visit them because we want to.**

We strive to develop our workforce who visit and build relationships with children and families because they want to, not just because they have to. We find the right balance between our moral and professional duty to support, ensuring we support children and families in the right way by doing the right thing.

**Wellbeing - Providing services that are focused on developing happy and healthy communities for our children and families.**

We will work to increase the quality of life for children and families in Middlesbrough by ensuring they have access to the health and wellbeing services they need. We will be proactive in promoting and role modelling a healthy lifestyle. We want children to recognise and communicate their achievements and have a positive outlook on their future.

**Culture and Society - Redefining the narrative of Middlesbrough.**

We believe we can redefine the narrative of Middlesbrough and communicate a positive perception of our town on a national basis. We will create an environment that people are proud to be a part of, one in which children and families matter. We will build the confidence of children and families, so that they are and feel part of the narrative.

**Communication and Connectivity - Using the communication methods used by children.**

We will create an environment where children can express themselves and communicate with us. Where they struggle to do so, we will support them and communicate and advocate on their behalf. We will enable children to be connected with those who they care about, whether that is digitally or physically.

**Learn and Achieve - Celebrating the achievements of children and being active participants in the attainment of them.**

We want to improve the access to education, employment and training opportunities for young people so they can achieve their academic and vocational potential. We believe to do this we need to create diverse opportunities in education, employment and training that will increase achievement and reduce deprivation within Middlesbrough.

**Future - Encouraging the ambition of our children and guiding them into the future they aspire to.**

We know that children are the future of Middlesbrough and champion an ethos that is proactive about their development. We want children to be heading towards positive futures and being the leaders of our town.

## Foster Carer's Charter

Middlesbrough Fostering Service believe that foster carers are at the heart of the arrangements for looked after children and must be fully engaged, supported and consulted at every stage of the child's placement.

This charter represents a statement of good practice for all foster carers and the family placement team. Together we should strive to achieve the best for the children and young people in our care.

- We are committed to the principle of the Team Around the Child.
- We embrace a partnership between the foster carers, social workers, supervising social workers, and other professionals all planning and working together in the best interests of the child.
- We will support foster carers to provide high quality care in a family setting to enable children and young people to have a stable and secure base.
- We will assist our foster carers to promote contact and maintain positive links with birth family members to enhance a child's and young person's identity and belonging.
- We will work with our foster carers to promote a child's and young person's education and learning to ensure that they attain their full potential.
- We will help our foster carers to support the children and young people to promote the physical and emotional wellbeing.
- We will assist our foster carers to develop their skills and knowledge to enable them to meet the needs of children and young people to the best of their ability. This will be recognised through our payment and banding structure.
- The fostering service welcomes opportunities to secure long term stability for young people and will provide the appropriate support to enable this to happen.

## National Minimum Standards

In 2000 National Minimum Care Standards were introduced by the government and with it came the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (2011). These Standards present a significant update of the requirements placed on fostering services in terms of the standard of care they are required to provide through the services' foster carers and the organisational infra-structure of the service.

The importance of these Standards to everyone involved in fostering cannot be understated as each individual fostering service are inspected by Ofsted on a regular basis and judged on the Standards.

The judgements range from inadequate, adequate, good, and outstanding. These judgements are published and become public documents.

The responsibility for meeting Standards primarily rests with the Fostering Service, however everyone connected to the service in terms of the delivery of care assume some responsibilities by virtue of their role; for example, as a foster carer you are responsible for the day-to-day care of any child or young person placed in your care.

The Standards are made up of 31 areas within 2 key themes. The 2 key themes are The Child and The Fostering Service. The Child theme covers every aspect of care for a child living within the care of local authority and placed in foster care. The theme of The Fostering Service relates to the way the Service functions, how it is managed and delivers the support to its foster carers.

The Standards are closely linked to the Fostering Service Regulations (2011) and the Care Planning and Review Regulations (2011). These are parts of the Children Act 1989 that relate specifically to children and young people placed in the care of a local authority and have carried out their duties by providing a fostering placement.

The Standards make the interpretation of the Regulations simpler and cover the majority of the individual regulation that makes up the whole set of legal requirements for fostering services and care.



## The Standards:

### 1. The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are considered in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.

The views of others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and considered.

### 2. Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

Children have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

### 3. Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

### 4. Safeguarding children

Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse, and accident.

### 5. Children missing from care

Children who go missing from foster placements are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return.

### 6. Promoting good health and wellbeing

Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they can access the services to meet their health needs.

### 7. Leisure activities

Children can enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities.

Children can make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community.

## 8. Promoting educational attainment

The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

## 9. Promoting and supporting contact

Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives.

## 10. Providing a suitable physical environment for the child in care

Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

## 11. Preparation for a placement

Children will be provided with a profile in respect of their prospective carer prior to the placement commencing. Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.

Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the foster carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met, and they benefit from a stable placement.

## 12. Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

Children are prepared for and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing. Foster carers who offer placements to young people aged 13+ are provided with Preparation for Adult Life Training.

## 13. Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people in care

The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.

#### 14. Foster Care Panels and the Fostering Service's Agency Decision Maker

The Foster Care Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

#### 15. Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed needs

The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

#### 16. Statement of purpose and children's guide

Children, their parents, foster carers, staff and the responsible / placing authority are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering service and what services and facilities it provides.

The fostering service's operation meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose.

#### 17. Fitness to provide or manage the administration of a fostering service

The fostering service is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service.

#### 18. Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity

The fostering service is financially sound.

Where a service is to close or substantially change, there is proper planning, to make the transition for children, foster carers and staff as smooth as possible.

#### 19. Suitability to work with children

There is careful selection of staff, fostering households, volunteers and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a Foster Care Panel and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children.

## 20. Learning and development of Foster Carers

Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively.

A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs.

## 21. Supervision and support of Foster Carers

Foster carers receive the support and supervision they need to care properly for children placed with them.

## 22. Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children and the person making the allegation and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

## 23. Learning, development and qualifications of staff

Children and foster carers receive a service from staff, volunteers and Foster Care Panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs.

## 24. Staff support and supervision

Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high-quality service to children.

## 25. Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

The fostering service is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.

## 26. Records

Records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child's life.

## 27. Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose.

### 28. Payment to carers

Payments to foster carers are fair and paid in a timely way.

Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them.

### 29. Notification of significant events

All significant events relating to the health and protection of children in fostering placements are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities.

### 30. Family and Friends as Foster Carers

Family and Friends Foster Carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

### 31. Placement Plan and Review

Children are cared for in line with their Placement Plan/Short Break Care Plan.

The fostering service acts to chase up outstanding reviews or visits from the responsible authority, contributes to those reviews and assists the child to contribute to their reviews.

The full National Minimum Standards are available at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards)

## A Guide to Newly approved Foster Carers

### Congratulations you are now an approved foster carer for Middlesbrough Council

The first thing that will happen once you have been to Panel and have been successful in being recommended as a foster carer for Middlesbrough Council you will receive a formal letter from the Agency Decision Maker stating your terms of approval. This may take 7 to 10 days.

You will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker (explanation of this person's role is further on in this section). They will contact you and arrange a visit to start your induction.

### Induction

Your induction includes a visit from your allocated Supervising Social Worker who will bring with them:

- Foster Carer Agreement.
- Information on Electronic Recording via My Middlesbrough.
- The Foster Carer Handbook.
- Information regarding Fostering Network.
- Information regarding contact numbers.
- Arrange dates for supervision.
- Dates for Foster Carer Support Groups.
- The Training Programme for the current year.
- Discussion on how to claim mileage.
- Discussion on how payments work.
- Explanation of key policy and procedures.

The Foster Carer Agreement is a very important document, which explains the legal aspects of fostering and requires a signature from you, your Supervising Social Worker and the Team Manager. Within the Agreement there are a number of responsibilities you must be aware of and comply with:

- Be aware of a child's social, educational, physical, emotional, religious and cultural needs.
- Provide each child with clothing, food, a bed and a small personal area or separate room if possible.
- Include each child in the activities of the home.
- Establish clear limits and expectations.

- Discipline fairly and deal with negative behaviour in a positive way – reward good behaviour.
- Where appropriate, encourage and promote a relationship with birth family – respect the child and his/her birth family.
- Understand and relate to each child from the outset, by listening to them.
- Understand, recognise and encourage a child's cultural and religious heritage and behave in a way which does not discriminate.
- Arrange for routine, emergency medical and dental care.
- Ensure that a child's educational needs are met as far as possible and assume responsibility for their daily school activities.
- Encourage a child's self-esteem and positive self-image.
- Work with all concerned (including the child) to make a permanent plan and help prepare the child to return to family or be placed with relatives or friends or alternative long-term carers.
- Help the child to speak up to be heard and listened to.
- Communicate relevant information and work with all individuals and agencies involved with the child.
- Attend and contribute to reviews, family meetings and court hearings as required.
- Keep written records of placements and contribute to reports.
- Be responsible for taking up training opportunities and understanding the need for continued need.
- Maintain confidential information and develop strategies to deal with this.
- Balance the demands of fostering and own home and family commitment.

Breaching any of these points by either party may result in formal action including a foster carer's approval being removed.

### Supervising Social Worker

All Foster Carers will have a Supervising Social Worker, who is a qualified Social Worker based in the Fostering Team. Their role is:

- To support Foster Carers via telephone calls, letter, groups, and regular visits to the Foster Carer's home.
- The Supervising Social Worker must make at least one unannounced visit to the Foster Carer's home per year.
- Arrange at least one visit every six months when all members of the household are present.
- The Supervising Social Worker must see the children of the Foster Carer, preferably on their own, with their parent's consent, at least once every three months.

### Social Worker - Visits

The Social Worker should visit when reasonably requested to by the child or the person who is caring for the child. When the child becomes looked after they should be visited weekly for the first 4 weeks and thereafter at least once every month, until; the child ceases to be looked after. There are exceptions to this, such as when a long-term match has been approved and visits have been agreed to be less often.

At least once a month the child should have the opportunity to talk alone and in confidence with their Social Worker – this could be during a visit or whilst they are transporting them.

Some visits to children should be unannounced and the child's bedroom should be seen from time to time. For children living with a family some visits should be at a time when all members of the household are present. A written record must be made of each visit to a child.

### Social Worker - Supervision

As part of the support, you have from the Fostering Service you receive supervision with your Supervising Social Worker. This is one to one time for you to discuss your welfare; your family's welfare; the placements and plans for the child; your training and development needs.

Supervision occurs monthly and is recorded with you having a copy which must be signed by you and the Supervising Social Worker and Team Manager. The purpose of this is to evidence the support you receive as well as record issues that may arise with either party and lead to formal responses. This is a two-way process and should be used with open and honest discussions that are mutually beneficial.

There will be actions following on from these sessions with clear responsibilities and time frames.



## Who is Who?

Apart from the Supervising Social Worker and a Child's Social Worker there are a number of other roles and people a foster carer will have contact with.

**Service Manager:** This person is the registered manager for the fostering service and manages the Fostering Team Managers, with a wide range of authority to make certain decisions including signing documents and giving permission for certain things in the absence of parental signatures.

**Fostering Team Managers:** This person manages the team of Supervising Social Workers and has overall responsibility for the management and organisation of one of the following teams: Support and Retention, Recruitment or Connected Persons.

**Social Work Team Manager:** This person is the line manager for a team of social workers who has responsibility of overseeing all children within the team's caseload and has authority to make certain decisions on a day-to-day basis.

**Head of Service:** This person has strategic oversight of the Child Care Service and manages the Service Managers. Plus, they can make decisions at a higher level than the Service Manager.

**Director of the Children, Families and Learning Department:** This person has the overall responsibility for the day-to-day and long-term planning of the Child Care Service on behalf of the local authority.

**Elected Member:** This person is a member of the local government that makes up the local borough council. Elected members have a collective corporate responsibility for the day-to-day running of the council including the Child Care Services. They in effect are Corporate Parents for children in care. Elected members may visit a foster carer with a Senior Child Care Manager as part of the internal safeguarding processes.

**Independent Reviewing Officer:** This person is an independent person who has independent oversight of the planning process for each child. They chair looked after reviews and they also chair a foster carer's annual review. Because they provide an independent view their opinions and reports are considered to be of value because of this.

**Independent Visitor:** This person provides a befriending role for any child or young person who is looked after and does not have contact with any family member. They provide an opportunity for a child or young person to talk to someone in confidence outside of the care system.

**Complaint's Officer:** This person is someone employed by the local authority to deal with any formal complaints from Children, Families and Carers.

**Education of Children Looked After Team:** The workers within this team are the link between a child's school and the foster carer. They talk to the school about any problem a child may be having at school. They are also involved when a child is truanting. They can also be involved in meetings concerning a child's Personal Education Plan (PEP).

**Educational Psychologist:** This person is there to help school understand the issues a child may be experiencing whilst at school that affects their learning. The specific area of interest and work for this person is to understand how the child learns and what is causing them difficulties. They are involved when a child is being assessed for a statement of educational needs (SEN).

**Health Visitor:** This person is attached to the local GP surgery or health centre. They work with children under 5 years old and with families who may need extra help with children over 5 years of age.

**Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO):** The designated person who gives advice to Social Workers and Team Managers in respect of any Child Protection concerns. They chair Strategy Meetings when allegations are made about foster carers.

**Looked after Nurse:** This person is employed by the local authority to focus on the development and education of children and young people in respect of their health. They also provide support to foster carers. They offer a range of services connected to the health needs of children.

**Children's Guardian:** This person is appointed by a court and does not work within a local authority. They are employed by CAFCASS and primarily look after the child's interest if someone has applied for a court order. This person will spend time with the child and their carers.

### Duty Numbers

The following numbers are the duty numbers for the Fostering Service and are to be used when you cannot get in touch with your Supervising Social Worker.

Business Support - 01642 201962

Fostering Recruitment - 01642 726617

Connected Persons - 01642 726616

Support and Retention - 01642 726615

## First Placement

The first placement a foster carer provides will undoubtedly introduce a whole host of different experiences, terminology, roles to consider. The following information is designed to help demystify the process and offer a simple explanation of the whole experience.

### Preparing for a Placement

When you are asked to consider taking a placement you need to have information available to you, to enable you to make an informed decision as to whether you could meet the child's needs.

Here is a checklist for you to refer to:

- Name of Child
- Gender of Child
- Date of Birth and Age
- Reason for the child being placed in foster care?
- What is the legal status of the child?
- Name of General Practitioner
- Does the child have any particular health or development issues?
- Does the child have any dietary needs?
- Does the child have any religious or cultural needs?
- What is the name of the child's school?
- What are the contact arrangements?
- Name and contact details of the child's social worker and team manager
- Names of any siblings, and where are they?
- Names of Parents
- Names of any other significant family members
- Previous placements? Information from previous carers
- Any known triggers?

### Placement Planning Meeting

This meeting is vital to establishing the routines for the child. The meeting where possible should include the child, the child's parents, the child's social work and your supervising social worker. This is an opportunity to ask parents particularly what they do with key aspects of their child's care for example, doing their hair, favourite foods.

The key to this meeting is to consider as many issues as possible and get some agreement on who is responsible for what. This is part of a delegated authority process and determines what you can give permission for.

The document **MUST** be signed by all parties, including the child if appropriate.

A copy of the referral and medical consent forms must also be provided at this meeting.

Placement Planning Meetings are to take place within 72 hours of the start of a placement.

### First LAC Review

The first review is normally held within 28 days of the placement being made. To not do so needs very good reasons. The meeting is chaired by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO's job is to establish that the placement is meeting the child's needs, identify areas for scrutiny and further development. They also spend time talking to the child on their own to ensure they capture the child's views, wishes and feelings. The recording of these is extremely important.

Your contribution to this meeting is valuable and you will be expected to complete a document which also captures the child's views, wishes and feelings. All this helps validate the plans in place.

The review will be recorded, and everyone gets a copy. There will be action points with named people responsible for the actions and timescales in which to complete them.

The key plans that should be considered at the Review are:

- Care Plan including recommendations for permanence.
- Permanence Plan (within or outside the family).
- Health Care Plan.
- Pathway Plan if applicable.
- Personal Education Plan.

### Four Month Review

This is often known as the 3-month review, because it occurs 3 months after the first, but is in fact four months from approval.

This review replicates the first, however there may be a part that focuses on the permanency plan for the child. This is because that legislation requires local authorities to have a permanency plan for every child in its care if they remain in care for four

months or likely to do so. The options at this stage will be discussed in the A-Z directory under permanency planning.

By this time, you will have made a significant contribution to the information sharing and planning & decision-making process. You may not be entirely aware of this however your views will be taken seriously at every stage, and you will most likely have contributed to written records.

### 10 Month Review

This is often known as the 6-month review, because it occurs 6 months after the second review.

This replicates the second review; however, the focus will be even more on the permanency plan for the child. By this time the permanency plan should be clear, and timescales known. There may be a whole host of process tasks to be completed tied to court hearings, permanency planning processes. The options at this stage will have become reduced and focused on one which could be return home or to extended family; adoption; long-term fostering.

By this time, you will have made even more of a significant contribution to the information sharing and planning & decision-making process. You will become increasingly aware of this, and your views and role will become more prominent as your role at this point is crucial to a successful transition to permanent living for the child. This may involve you becoming the permanent carer and therefore your input will be taken seriously at every stage.

### Personal Education Plan

Within 14 days of a child being placed in foster care and of school age a Personal Education Plan (PEP) must be prepared. This plan ties into the different roles provided by the school, carers, social workers the child, plus the family if appropriate. The PEP states the education support and services that will be provided to help the child meet their educational needs.

Your presence is crucial and will include how, where and when school; homework, transport, extra curriculum activities are undertaken and who is responsible. This plan is reviewed termly as a minimum as the child's needs develop.

### Planning Meeting

There are various other types of meetings that contribute to the care of a child and the associated plans. These are often referred to as Planning Meetings. These meetings are about sharing information and making decisions regarding the child's plan.

Wherever possible the child's family are involved as the decisions will always have an impact on the future of their child. Your role is often to take the information and talk to the child about the decisions made. The child's social worker will either support you or take the lead in this work. These meetings should take place on a monthly basis, unless otherwise advised.

### Permanency Planning Meeting

As previously stated, the child must have a permanence plan as soon as reasonably possible. There is always a formal meeting where the local authority determines their plan for permanency for the child.

You may be invited to this. However, if you are not, it is because there is a legal debate to be had and this may determine the final plan. The parents rarely attend for obvious reasons, however, both the parents and yourself will be advised of the permanency plan immediately after this meeting.

### Planned Endings

The aim should be to achieve a planned ending with careful preparation and transition, whether the child or young person is returning to their family, moving to another placement in care, an adoptive placement or on to independent living.

Foster carers have an important role to play in preparing and reassuring the child or young person, assisting in gradual introductions and in helping the next Carers to understand the child or young person's habits, routines and needs.

Planning and preparation for leaving care should begin in good time if the young person is moving on to independence from a foster home. The duty to provide support after leaving care lies with the Local Authority, not the foster carers. Planned endings need to be in line with the child's needs and not the carers.

In some cases, the fostering family may be willing to continue in a befriending role to a young person who has left care and the foster home.

### Independence Plan

Children and young people normally experience a sense of independence at different stages of their development. As young children it is associated to their attachment and social skills. As teenage years and adolescence come into a young person's development the level of independence normally increases and they start to engage in a range of behaviours that may on occasions result in consequences they had not considered possible.

Many young people will require their Foster Carers to support them and help them develop skills in preparation for an independent living situation. The Pathways Team is a key service directly responsible for supporting young people in preparing for independence.

A pathway plan is an important document that prepares young people for leaving care. This may include suitable accommodation, mental health counselling or support to help the young person achieve your career goals.

### Unplanned Endings

These may happen where a crisis leads the Local Authority to remove the child/young person immediately; where the foster carer asks for the child/young person to leave or where the child/young person insists on leaving. Where the child/young person is being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, a parent may insist on removing the child/young person. In this case the carer should inform the child's Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker immediately so that appropriate decisions can be made.

A Local Authority may not allow a child/young person to remain in a foster home if it considers that his/her best interests are not served by staying there. Ideally, a child or young person should not change placement without an early Child in Care Review Meeting being convened unless deemed to be 'at risk'.

In situations where foster carers are beginning to feel that a placement should no longer continue, they should not feel they have failed. Nor should they be reluctant to contact their Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker before they reach breaking point. The earlier all concerned are made aware of the situation, the sooner they can help and offer additional support. The priority should be to avoid the child leaving in an emergency. Both the child and the foster carers will need help in coping with a disrupted placement. As with Planned Endings, unplanned endings need to be in line with the child's needs and not the carers.

### Disruption Meetings

If a permanent placement breaks down, there may need to be a Disruption Meeting. This is to help everyone involved identify factors leading to the breakdown, to learn from the experience and to plan for the future.

## Foster Carer Review

Foster Carers receive an annual review that reflects their achievements of the previous 12 months. These are quite formal chaired by the IRO assigned to you. You are required to complete a report which makes up the meeting. Similarly, your Supervising Social Worker will do the same. The social worker of the child/ren you have cared for over that 12-month period will be asked to give an evaluative report to help evidence the work you have done. Similarly, if you have children they will be asked to contribute as their views are extremely important.

There should not be any surprises for you at the review as any issues or difficulties should have been addressed through supervision. The review will be summarised, and your approval be re-confirmed, or amendments recommended based on the discussions.

If it is your first review or a change of approval be proposed this will require the review to be presented to the Panel. Your attendance is encouraged to help the Panel understand the reasons for the changes. As with your original approval they will make a recommendation and it is the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision based on all the information presented.

On occasions foster carers do not agree with the revised recommendation or indeed the continued approval if changes are preferred. If the Panel chooses to make a recommendation you are not in agreement with you do have the right to submit a letter of representation offering further information you think was either missed or is in addition to that presented in the first instance. Alternatively, you can seek consideration via the Independent Review Mechanism which may or may not support the Panel recommendations and or the Agency Decision Maker.

### Continued Approval

All foster carers will have their own reviews at least annually. The review is to assess whether the foster carer and the household continue to be suitable, however, the guidance explains that this should include wider discussion on for example, the carer's view of the Fostering Service and it should help in understanding the fostering service as a whole.

Such a review should also take place whenever there is a change in address, or significant changes in the household, for example, health problems; births; marriages and deaths; or if serious allegations are made against a member of the foster carer's household.



In any review, the agency must take the foster carer's views into account, along with those expressed by any other agency, which has placed children with them during the year under review.

The review and decisions must be recorded, and the foster carer must be notified of any changes or termination of approval. Where there is any disagreement a 'representation' procedure and/or Independent Review Mechanism is available.

Foster Carer's can and do resign. This terminates the approval, providing the resignation is in writing and remains in place for 28 days.

### Changes in Approval

When there are significant changes in a foster carer's approval, for example, from temporary to permanent care or widening age range, such matters should be referred to the Foster Care Panel for recommendation regarding re-approval.

### Termination of Approval

Where carers decide to withdraw from fostering, for example, due to retirement or changes in personal circumstances this should be put in writing to their local Supervising Social Worker/Team Manager. The letter will be presented to the Family Placement Panel along with a brief report from the Supervising Social Worker. A formal letter of termination of approval will be sent confirming that they are no longer foster carers. Once a carer has submitted their resignation, regulations state that this will automatically take effect 28 days later and it is not possible for the carer to withdraw this resignation.

Where Fostering Service has reason to terminate approval of carers against their wishes, the carers should be given full details as to why in the form of a report to the Foster Care Panel. Carers can provide their own report to the Panel and can attend the Panel and bring someone to support them if they wish.

Following the Panel's recommendation to terminate approval of a carer, the Agency Decision Maker will either endorse or overturn the recommendation and the carer will receive a Qualifying Determination letter detailing the reason for the decision.

If a carer is not satisfied with the outcome, they have a right to appeal the decision within 28 days of the receipt of the letter to either the Foster Care Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism. A further recommendation is then made to the Agency Decision Maker.

## Retirement Age of Foster Carers

The fostering service reviews all carers annually to re-assess their suitability to undertake the fostering role for which they are currently approved. As foster carers become older, their ability to undertake more strenuous, demanding forms of care may decline. This should be openly and sensitively considered with them, both at reviews and at the end of challenging placements.

The foster carer approval should reflect their abilities, skills, physical health and mental health. Foster carers are not required to retire at any particular age, however, should significant health issues be noted at a review, a further medical should be sought, and advice taken from the Medical Advisor.

## Training, Support and Development

As an approved foster carer, you are entitled to receive a range of support from the Fostering Service. The support includes the input from your Supervising Social Workers as previously discussed. However, one of the biggest sources of support comes from other foster carers. Therefore, you are able and encouraged to get involved with the regular Foster Carer Support Groups facilitated by the service. These can be informal and on occasions more formal with guest speakers.

Also, as an approved foster carer you will be expected to undertake regular training and developmental opportunities. In the first few weeks of your approval your Supervising Social Worker will help you identify your Personal Development Plan (PDP), including any development needs and training and put a plan together. This will help you develop as a foster carer and improve your knowledge and skills when providing care for children.

The list of mandatory training that is required by all carers is as follows:

- Paediatric First Aid – Every Three Years
- Managing Allegations – Every Three Years
- Safeguarding Children – Annually
- Risk Management and Safer Caring – Every Three Years
- General Data Protection Regulations – Annually
- Fostering Digital Skills Programme (DigiWise – Fostering Network)
- Digital Passport – Annual Passport

However, it should be noted that additional mandatory training maybe added to this list, as and when new courses become available.

The fostering service produces a yearly training programme running from April each year. Discuss your training needs with your Supervising Social Worker at your annual PDP or monthly supervisions.

## Training, Support and Development (TSD Standards)

As part of the training requirement, all foster carers must complete their Training, Support and Development Standards. This takes the form of a Workbook.

Foster carers play an extremely important role, providing much needed support and security for often very vulnerable children, and enabling their successful transition into independent adult life. Fostering is a challenging role and requires skills and dedication.

The Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards form part of a foster carer's induction in the role. They provide a national minimum benchmark that sets out what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12-months after being approved. (Fully Approved Connected Carers get 18-months to complete).

These standards were developed by the sector and were introduced in 2007 and apply to all approved foster carers in England.

The seven standards are:

Standard 1: Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.

Standard 2: Understand your role as a foster carer.

Standard 3: Understand health and safety, and healthy caring.

Standard 4: Know how to communicate effectively.

Standard 5: Understand the development of children and young people.

Standard 6: Safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm).

Standard 7: Develop yourself.

The TSD Standards provide a national minimum benchmark to set out what all foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12 months of approval. They form part of a national strategy, supported by the Department for Education, to raise the profile of foster carers as valued professionals and to improve and standardise service provision for looked after children.

All foster care providers are expected to engage with their foster carers to support them in achieving the TSD Standards. This ensures that the Standards are delivered in a way which allows carers to understand how the standards support them in their caring role, encouraging them to build on any areas for development identified in their assessment.

## Safer Care Policy

Foster carers are to encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. They must help children understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the home or when using the internet or social media.

The Safer Care Policy document considers particular risks and identifies appropriate behaviour in relation to those risks. The Supervising Social Worker is to ensure that a Safer Care Policy document is completed during the placement process. Supervising Social Workers must make sure that all members of the household are involved in this process.

The Safer Care Policy document is to be reviewed:

- At least once a year at the foster carer review.
- If there are any changes in the fostering household.
- At a child's statutory review if further risks are identified, or there have been any significant changes.

A Safer Caring Policy document is to be completed when a child or young person is about to be placed or at any time during the placement, where there are additional risks identified and not already covered. This document is shared with the child at an age-appropriate level by the foster carer and child's Social Worker.

The Safer Care Policy document includes the following sections:

- Family Household.
- What is your Approval Status?
- Bedrooms.
- Bath Time.
- Bedtime.
- Leisure Time.
- Transport.
- Support the Placement.
- Names.
- Taking Photos and Videos.
- Education about Sex and Sexuality.
- Recording.
- Management Oversight and Authorisation.

It is recommended you read the booklet 'Safer Care Policy', which will help you complete your document.

# The Law Relating to Children

## **The Children Act 1989**

All Child Care Law relating to children being accommodated by the Local Authority comes under the Children Act 1989. At the heart of the Children Act is a belief that:

- The best place for children to be Looked After is within their own homes.
- The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
- Parents should continue to be involved with their children and any legal proceedings that may concern them and that legal proceedings should be unnecessary in most instances.
- The welfare of children should be promoted by partnership between the family and the Local Authority.
- Children should not be removed from their family or contact terminated, unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.
- The child's needs arising from race, culture, religion and language must be considered.

## **Parental Responsibility**

The Act is built on the notion of 'Parental Responsibility'. This summarises the duties, rights, powers and responsibilities of a parent in respect of their child. People other than parents can acquire shared Parental Responsibility. The Local Authority acquires Parental Responsibility if a Care Order or Emergency Protection Order is made. However, in the case of a Care Order the extent to which parental responsibility can be exercised by a parent may be limited by the Local Authority. If a Child Arrangement Order is made, Parental Responsibility is shared with the person looking after the child. Parents can delegate responsibility to someone else without losing it themselves.

## **Children in Need**

The Local Authority has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of 'Children in Need' in its area. A 'Child in Need' is defined as 'one whose health or development is likely to be impaired if he or she is not provided with a service or a child who is disabled'. A child must be provided with accommodation if:

- There is no parent with Parental Responsibility for them.
- They are lost or abandoned.
- The person who has been caring for them is prevented (whether or not permanently and for whatever reason) from providing suitable accommodation or care.

### Children being 'Looked After' by the Local Authority

Accommodation may be provided on a voluntary basis (Section 20). The person with Parental Responsibility (PR) may remove the child at any time, except when someone else who has PR under a Child Arrangement Order agrees with the accommodation.

Young people aged 16 and over may choose to be, or remain, accommodated against the wishes of someone with Parental Responsibility. This would be assessed by a Social Worker.

The Act states that, if reasonably practicable, a child should be placed with a person whom he or she knows, placed as near to his or her home as possible and siblings should stay together. If a child has a disability, the accommodation should be suitably equipped.

Children may be looked after under a Court Order. This may be an Emergency Protection Order, Police Protection Order, Remand or an Interim or Full Care Order. A parent may not remove a child if he/she without the consent of Court.

### Family Proceedings

All court cases brought under the Children Act together with Adoption, Matrimonial Law and High Court Proceedings are classified as Family Proceedings. Cases will be heard by Magistrates who have been specially trained. If cases are particularly complex or urgent, they may be allocated to a higher Court to be heard by a Family Court Judge. There will usually be an informal preliminary hearing to sort out the timetable, the appointment of a Children's Guardian or solicitor and possibly the attendance of the child.

### Welfare of the Child

The most important principle of the Children Act is the welfare of the child. This will always be regarded as paramount by a court in considering any question of the child's upbringing. When the court is making a decision, it must use the following checklist as it decides what to do:

- The wishes and feelings of the child, as far as the court can find these out.
- The physical, emotional, and educational needs of the child.
- The likely effects on the child of any changes in his or her circumstances.
- The age, sex, background and any other characteristics of the child that the court considers to be relevant.
- Any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering.
- How capable each parent or other relevant person is of meeting the child's needs.
- The range of power available to the court under the Children Act.

## Legal Proceedings and Court Orders

Decisions made by the court are called Court Orders and are as follows:

### Child Arrangement Order

Settles the arrangements for where a child or young person must live and gives that person or person's Parental Responsibility. A Child Arrangement Order can be made in favour of more than one person, even when those people do not live together. If this is the case, the Order may specify the period during which the child is to live in different households.

### A Contact Order

Is made by the court stating who can have contact with the child or young person. The Order will define if the child may receive visits or stay with a person, write or receive letters or speak to them on the telephone.

The people concerned may be birth parents, grandparents, brother/sister or other people who are or have been significant in the child or young person's life. The Order will last until the child/young person reaches the age of 16 or until the Court decides the order is no longer necessary.

### A Specific Issues Order

An Order to help determine any specific question which may have arisen or may arise, about the way a child is brought up. It might be about schooling, health or religion. The court will decide after consultation with appropriate persons how it should be achieved in the best interests of the child.

## Care Orders and Supervision Orders

The court can only make a Care Order or a Supervision Order if it is satisfied that:

- The child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.
- The harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to the care given, or likely to be given, to the child - and is not what would be reasonably expected of a parent.
- Or the child is beyond parental control.

### Care Order

If the criteria for a Care Order has been established the court may not necessarily make a Care or Supervision Order. It must go through the agreed checklists first and should only make the Order if it considers that doing so would be better for the child than making no Order at all.



The court will expect the Local Authority to inform it of what plans there are for a child, so that it can be satisfied that the Care Order is in the child's best interests.

A Care Order gives the Local Authority a share in Parental Responsibility for a child. The Local Authority must look after the child and provide him or her with somewhere to live. A Care Order can last until a young person is 18 years old or until an Adoption, Supervision or Child Arrangement Order is made or until the court decides that the Order is no longer necessary. The Children and Young People's Services or persons with Parental Responsibility for the child can apply for the discharge of the Order.

### Supervision Order

This places a child or young person under the supervision of the Local Authority or a Probation Officer, this person is required to advise, help and befriend the child. The Order can only be for one year, but the supervisor can apply for this to be extended. It must not be for more than three years in all and not after the person is 18 years old.

A Supervision Order may carry certain conditions for example, that the child should have medical or psychiatric examination or treatment. It may also say that the child should take part in particular activities at specified times. The Order can be stopped if any interested parties apply to the court and the court agrees or if a Care Order is made.

### Interim Order

An Interim Care or Supervision Order can initially be made for up to eight weeks and subsequently renewed for a four-week period so that more information can be collected. At this stage, the court can make any Orders subject to the restrictions that apply to these Orders.