

# Middlesbrough Fostering Service

## Safer Care Policy Document



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## Safer Care Policy Document

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. (Automatically populated in LCS).
- What is your Approval Status? (Automatically populated in LCS).
- 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. (Completed by Management in LCS).

## [Developing Your Safer Care Policy](#)

Once you are clear about how your family operates, the next step is to consider strategies that will help you ensure that your home is a safe place at all times. This means 'safe' for any foster child, for any children of your own, for yourself and other members of your family network and for other people who share your life.

Whether or not you realise it, each family will have developed its own strategies for day-to-day living. Foster Carers need to be even more aware of these strategies than other families because, as adults, you need to take responsibility for how you will manage things when a child or young person joins your household. You need to be clear about the strategies you use, and you need to check them to make sure they will help you reduce the risks involved in fostering children.

We suggest that you work out a clear set of 'home rules' for your 'Safer Care Policy Document'. The policy will describe how you have decided that everyone will behave in future in certain circumstances. It is a way of identifying behaviour that is risky, so people in the family can avoid situations that increase risk. It will help you know how to deal with some things that might seem ordinary enough within your own family but are not safe in a foster home.

Working out your Safer Care Policy Document will also help you acknowledge the possible impact on your life of the child's previous experiences, as well as the possible impact of your family's way of life on the child. The aim is for you to understand what might happen and to guard against blaming the foster child for things that might go wrong.

Your aim will be to work out ways of doing things that are not open to misinterpretation and do not make the child feel threatened. This will help children to have control over their own bodies and to gain increasing control over their own lives.

### [Who Should be Involved?](#)

The whole family should be involved in agreeing your policy and in reviewing it each year or when your family circumstances change.

It is particularly important that men consider their role carefully since most allegations are made against male carers and most abusers are heterosexual men. This does not mean passing all responsibility on to women. It means that men have to work out how to provide care safely and be supported in this.

Your Safer Care Policy Document should be written with the help of your Supervising Social Worker and reviewed on a regular basis.

## How to Work Out Your Safer Care Policy Document

Working out a Safer Care Policy Document is not about changing everything that you do. It is about thinking about what bits of your behaviour involve risk and working out what you can do, so that 'Safer Caring' becomes part of your everyday life.

We will now look at each section of the document. Each section has a number of questions that need to be answered on the form, highlighted in bold. This is followed by some guidance, which may assist you in writing your policy document.

### Bedrooms

**'How do you ensure the child/young people in your house have space, privacy and are able to keep their possessions safe?'**

**'How do you maintain privacy in your bedroom?'**

#### Children's Bedrooms

As a fundamental principle, all fostered children need their own bedroom with space to store belongings, play and study. There are some exceptions to this rule, for example brothers and sisters may share a bedroom up to 10 years of age.

For some families, lack of personal space is not an issue. Although the ideal might be for every child to have their own bedroom, many foster carers simply do not have enough space to make this possible. If you cannot provide this this would need to be agreed prior and social workers consulted and your foster child is sharing a bedroom with another child, you should speak with your supervising social worker about what is acceptable behaviour. An important thing is for everyone to be clear about what has happened to the child or young person in the past, what they now need and how this can be provided. As a general rule, unrelated children should not be sharing a bedroom on an ongoing basis.

Some children who have been abused might need their own space so that they can learn that they have the right to be safe and private. This might be their own bedroom or could perhaps be a shared room that is divided by a partition or furniture. For some children the important thing will be to have somewhere to keep their possessions safe.

Your Safer Care Policy Document should be clear about bedroom rules, whether or not children are sharing. As children grow older, they should be given increasing control over who goes into their room. Anyone who needs to go into a child's bedroom should ask permission first and should leave the door open. This applies to children as with adults.

## The Foster Carers' Bedroom

Some parents like to let young children get into their bed to talk, play and listen to stories or to be comforted when they are not well. You need to be aware of the danger of doing this when you are fostering a child. It is one of the dilemmas created for you as a family when you are trying to give your own children a normal upbringing while wanting to provide safe care for the children you foster.

You need to avoid doing the wrong thing for the right reason. Children and young people need comfort and affection but sharing your bed can trigger experiences of abuse and give the wrong messages about what might happen and what is acceptable. It will be safer to provide all children with a time of warmth and affection outside your bedroom.

Babies may share a bedroom with their carers, but advice should be sought from your supervising social worker when two babies are sharing. This is not ideal as they can disturb each other, especially when they have different sleep patterns. Preparations in moving them out of a cot once mobile and into their own rooms should be considered between 6 and 24 months.

## Bath Time

**'Depending upon the age of the child/young person fostered, who supervises bath time and how?'**

**'How do you ensure that children and adults are appropriately dressed?'**

All children who are old enough and able to bath and wash themselves should have privacy in the bathroom. If a child needs adult help and supervision, it is preferable for a female carer (or older female children) to bath, dry and dress them or for both carers to do these tasks together. The door should be kept unlocked and slightly open.

It is important to think about how people dress around the home. Don't walk around in your underwear or nightwear. If you do, you could trigger something in a child's memory and cause them to respond sexually. Their misinterpretations might leave family members feeling confused and uncomfortable and not knowing what to do about it. Make sure that your family, and children joining your household, has a dressing gown and slippers as well as nightwear.

## Bedtime

**'Describe the supervision of your bedtime routine for the child/ren/young person living in your household?'**

This calls for similar precautions to the bathtime routine and for the same reasons. Again, it might be preferable for a female carer or older female children to carry out

this task, or for both carers to be involved in a foster home with a female and male carer.

Carers, including women, should leave the door open when putting children to bed. Everyone must think about doing things in a way that is safe for children.

### Leisure Time

**‘In which areas of your home do you allow children/young people to spend their leisure time?’**

**‘How do you ensure safe access to the internet by the young person?’**

**‘How do you monitor the situation if children and young people take friends to their bedroom?’**

**‘What precautions do you take if children/young people spend time with friends outside the home?’**

**‘What steps do you need to take before a young person stays over at a friend's house?’**

**‘Describe the steps you would take if a young person was to go missing from the placement?’**

**‘Describe the steps taken should an accident/injury/incidences occur involving the child/young person?’**

**‘Describe any activities in your leisure time that could pose a risk to children/young person’**

Keep all children within earshot when they are playing and have a quick check when they go quiet. Don't let them play behind closed doors or in bedrooms where you cannot keep an eye on them easily.

You need to think about what responsibility you have as a carer of a child who wants to go out to play with other children. Think what you can do to make sure everyone is safe. You might decide that the child and others should play at your home. These decisions about safety and privacy are more difficult when they are about older children. You have to decide what's the best thing to do. If you are not sure discuss it with your Supervising Social Worker.

Care and careful supervision is needed when children and young people are using computers as the Internet sites are easily accessible and they may look at those that are unsuitable. All carers are to undergo the Digital Skills training via the Fostering Network. This training will give carers the skills and knowledge to administer

appropriate restrictions on their internet hub and devices. All children over the age of 10 years should have a Digital Passport, which is updated annually.

Make sure you know the protocol for responding to children who are missing from placement. If in doubt talk to your Supervising Social Worker.

## Transport

**‘What is your routine when transporting the children by car?’**

**‘How do you reduce the risk of allegations when transporting the children?’**

**‘How do you ensure safety on other modes of transport?’**

Think carefully about travelling alone in a car with a foster child. It can be a good way of giving a child the opportunity to have one-to-one contact because it is often easier to talk without eye contact. However, a child may feel unsafe alone in a car with an adult, even more so if that is where they have been abused in the past.

A safe rule is for Foster Carers to avoid travelling alone with a foster child. If this cannot be avoided at times, the child should travel in the back of the car.

## Support the Placement

**‘Who is identified as an alternative carer?’**

**‘What precautions would you put in place to ensure overall safety?’**

**‘What precautions do you take to reduce the risk of allegations when a carer is caring for children/young people on their own?’**

**‘How do you and your family normally demonstrate affection?’**

## When You Go Out

You need to be clear about what your Supervising Social Worker considers are satisfactory arrangements for caring for children when you are out. You have responsibilities towards the children you are looking after and towards people whom you invite to babysit or look after older children. You need to think what you can do to avoid putting anyone at risk.

Perhaps you could make an arrangement with other Foster Carers. It is advisable to have two people each time. If you have just one don't let it be your own child or another teenager.



## Showing Affection

People have different ways of showing affection and you need to be careful not to impose your way on others. A safe rule to follow is that no one touches another person's body without the person's permission. Children should always be asked first if they would like a kiss or a hug or cuddle. They need to be taught by a caring adult to say "no" if they do not want to be touched.

You might need to help an older foster child work out how to seek comfort from an adult without clinging to them physically. Avoid tickling and wrestling games that involve touching as that can be misinterpreted. Don't do things that place you, as an adult, in a position of physical power over a child and reinforces the child's inability to stay in control.

## Names

### **'Describe how to provide guidance to a child/young person regarding appropriate use of names in your family?'**

Avoid young children calling you 'mummy' or 'daddy'. Foster Carers are not a child's parents and should not present themselves as such. It could also lead to confusion because it might be hard for children to distinguish between their parents and Foster Carers and between different set of Foster Carers. Encourage children to call you by your first name.

## Taking Photos and Videos

### **'What are the issues about taking photographs of children/young people in your care?'**

When you do take photos or videos, ask the child's permission first and make sure that they get copies for themselves and that they know who else will see them and why. Be sensitive to how children react to having their photo taken. Be prepared not to take photos at all or to stop if you need to.

Don't take photos of children having a bath or wearing no clothes or just their underwear or nightwear.

Never post any photos or videos on social media platforms.

## Education about Sex and Sexuality

**‘How do you communicate with children (at various stages in their development) their feelings and behaviours regarding sex and sexuality?’**

**‘What would help you to become more comfortable to do this?’**

Sex education is essential for all members of the household, and it needs to be geared to the child’s age. It needs to be about two things: the changes in your body as you grow older, and relationships. Carers need to be well informed about sexual matters and children need their knowledge updated regularly as they grow older. You need to keep the communication open so you get to know what is being taught and said at school and in other places, and so you can fill in any gaps or sort out any misunderstandings.

Children need to learn how to avoid situations that might put themselves at risk of abuse and how to protect themselves and others from inappropriate sexual activity.

Carers need to know how to explain the difference between what is and is not acceptable behaviour, and how to help children change behaviour that is not right for their age.

The wide variations that exist in family traditions will mean that people will have different approaches, both to how children gain information about sex and sexuality and to what they are told. You will need to seek advice about the best ways of raising these issues with children who have a different cultural or religious background from your own.

## Recording

**‘How will you ensure the daily requirements of record keeping?’**

Record keeping is one of the most important tools a foster carer has to protect themselves in the event of an allegation. It is important that foster carers understand what, when and how they should be recording.

Accurately recall behaviour or incidents including dates, either positive or negative and provide a balanced picture of particular events.

Good recordings can assist in looking at the progress of a placement and help in developing a picture, over-time, of the child’s pattern of behaviour in various situations.

It can help to inform decision-making at foster carer reviews and placement planning meetings and provide the information needed for giving evidence in court or writing a report for court.

And finally, it can reduce the risk to you and your family of allegations or complaints while the child is in your care, and after the child/young person has moved on.

Record important events in child or young person's life including visits, appointments, observations, emergencies, health issues, medication, advice and guidance from professionals.

Always record factual information and remember confidentiality of information and who will read them.

Remember that these records belong to the child and that one day they might read them, be child focussed or even write to the child.