

Risk Assessment and Safety Planning

STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- [Regulation 12 - arrangement for protection of child.](#)
- [Regulation 15 - Health of children placed with foster parents.](#)

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards:

- [Standard 6 - Promoting good health and wellbeing.](#)
- [Standard 10 - Providing a suitable physical environment for a child.](#)
- [Standard 11 - Preparing for a placement.](#)
- [Standard 26 - Records.](#)

RELATED GUIDANCE

- [Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked-After Children \(Department for Education\)](#)

Risk assessment and safety planning in foster homes in the UK is essential to ensure the well-being and safety of foster children and the foster family.

Risk assessments in foster care aim to identify potential or actual risks and develop plans to minimize harm or the likelihood of harm. It is necessary and desirable for children to take risks as they grow and develop, as it helps them develop a healthy awareness of danger, learn to manage difficult situations, and acquire necessary skills. However, everyone involved in caring for children in foster care has a responsibility to ensure that risks are assessed and managed appropriately. While risks can never be eliminated, they can be effectively managed through careful assessment and planning.

Risk assessments are conducted by all agencies involved in Children's Social Care, including the children's social worker and the IFA. These assessments should be specific to the child or young person and the foster home, and they should be regularly reviewed. Foster carers are actively involved in the formulation of risk assessments and must adhere to the guidelines and strategies outlined for themselves and the children they care for.

Children and young people placed in foster care may have experienced events that impact the level and type of care they require to ensure their safety and the safety of others. Possessing a risk assessment does not guarantee absolute safety, but it can serve as a useful tool to help prevent potential situations. Foster carers should always seek advice promptly regarding dangerous or high-risk behaviours as this will allow all involved with the child to reassess risk in a timely manner which will ensure the child's safety.

Risk assessments should consider various factors, including risks from others (such as known individuals with harmful intentions), risks related to the child or young person's health or disability, risks from going missing or being exploited, risks from parents or family members, and other external factors that may impact the child's safety and well-being.

Regular monitoring and review of risk assessments are crucial because risk levels can change over time. Foster carers play an active role in contributing to the assessment based on their experience with the child or young person.

The supervising social worker must review the risk assessment and safer caring policy during the supervision sessions with the foster carer after the child is placed. They should update and review the risk assessment at least annually or when there are significant changes in the child's circumstances or the foster home. Additionally, they should ensure that foster carers receive appropriate training and support to manage risks effectively.

When placing a child or young person in foster care, social workers should include information about known or potential risks in the Placement Referral form. The risk assessment will inform the matching process and ensure that any known risks can be effectively managed and provisions will be made for potential risks. It is important to distinguish between facts and opinions in the risk assessment, and the frequency and level of risk should be recorded. Any vulnerabilities should be documented, and appropriate actions to address these risks should be outlined. Foster carers and the Fostering Service should feel confident in providing appropriate and safe care for the child.

In emergency placements, the initial risk assessment may be brief and involve limited input from the child and those who know them well. However, the supervising social worker and the child's social worker should ensure that the risk assessment is fully completed at the earliest opportunity.

Here are some key considerations for conducting risk assessments and implementing safety planning in foster homes:

1. Initial Form F assessment: Prior to placing a child in a foster home, a comprehensive assessment of the foster carers and their home environment will be conducted. This assessment includes background checks, home visits, and interviews to evaluate the suitability of the foster carers, their family and the safety of their home.
2. Risk assessment: A thorough risk assessment (Home Safety check/Pet assessment) will be conducted for each foster home to identify potential hazards or risks that may affect the safety of the child. This assessment considers factors the physical home environment including pets.
3. Safety planning: Based on the above mentioned risk assessment, safety plans (General and Individual Safer care plans) will be developed and implemented in collaboration with the foster carers. The safety plans will outline measures to mitigate identified risks and ensure the child's safety. It includes specific actions, protocols, and guidelines for addressing emergencies or potentially harmful situations and is signed by all members of the fostering household.

4. Training and support for foster carers: Foster carers will receive comprehensive training on child protection, risk management, and safety procedures. This forms part of the support package to equip foster carers with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and respond to potential risks effectively. Ongoing support will also be provided to foster carers through regular supervision, access to professional advice, support networks, and an out of hours support line.
5. Supervision and monitoring: Regular visits and supervision by social workers will be conducted to monitor the foster home and assess the child's well-being. Social workers will ensure that safety protocols are being followed, update those as appropriate, address any emerging risks, and provide guidance and support to foster carers as needed.
6. Communication and collaboration: Effective communication and collaboration between all parties involved, including social workers, foster carers, birth parents (where appropriate), and other professionals, are crucial for assessing risks and progress. Information sharing, regular updates, and joint decision-making contribute to a comprehensive approach.
7. Health and well-being: Foster carers should prioritize the physical and emotional health of the foster child. This includes ensuring access to appropriate healthcare, regular medical check-ups, and addressing any specific health needs or concerns. Foster carers should also provide a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the child's overall well-being.
8. Record-keeping and documentation: Accurate and detailed records must be maintained throughout the foster care placement. This includes documentation of risk assessments, safety plans, incidents, actions taken, and any communication or agreements with relevant parties. Robust record-keeping helps in monitoring progress, identifying patterns, sharing information, and ensures accountability.
9. Review and learning: Regular reviews of risk assessments, safety plans, and overall practice will be conducted to identify areas for improvement and address any emerging risks.

All risk assessments should clearly state the identified risks and how they will be managed safely. They should be signed, dated, and regularly reviewed, especially when situations change. Both the foster carer and the child should receive a copy, and the assessments should be kept on record.

Risks are categorized as:

- Low,
- Moderate, or
- High.

After identifying actions to manage the risks, the levels should be re-evaluated, taking into account the impact of these actions. Control measures can take the following forms:

1. Advice: Advice involves developing skills, providing appropriate training, and ensuring supervision and observation to reduce risks.
2. Protection: Protection may require specific equipment or specialist expertise.
3. Avoidance: Avoidance entails avoiding situations where risks cannot be adequately mitigated by advice and protection.

In summary, risk assessments are an essential part of foster care, aiming to identify potential risks and develop plans to minimize harm or the likelihood of harm. They will be specific to the child/young person and the foster home, regularly reviewed, and involve the active participation of foster carers. By effectively assessing and managing risks, foster carers and agencies involved in with the child can create a safer environment for children and young people in foster care.

BFFC's IFA uses the following risk assessments:

- 1) Family and Individual Safer Care Plan
- 2) Risk assessment as part of the Matching Grid when a child first comes to live with you
- 3) Home Safety check, car checks and DBS
- 4) Eileen Munro's 5 stage risk assessment
- 5) Holiday/Travel risk assessment