

Unannounced Visits

Introduction and Legal Framework

The requirement for unannounced visits to foster carers is set out in the Statutory Guidance and the National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers.

1.1 Standards and regulations

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

[National Minimum Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the Foster Child](#)

10.5 The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.

[National Minimum Standard 21: Support and Supervision of Foster Carers](#)

21.8 Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.

The purpose of the visit is also set out in the Guidance and Standards.

[Fostering Services, Guidance and Regulations – Statutory Guidance](#)

3.82 Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.

5.67 Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker's role to supervise the foster carer's work, to ensure that they are meeting the child's needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer's performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.

2. Why do foster carers have unannounced visits?

Unannounced visits are one way of the fostering agency to get a better understanding of the child's lived experience within the foster home and forms an important part of safeguarding children in care.

Although the minimum requirement is at least one visit a year, our policy is that there will be a minimum of at least 2 unannounced visits per year. This requirement better reflects the changing compositions of fostering households and will allow us to better monitor the experience of children.

The use of additional unannounced visits should be considered if there are concerns about the standards of care or as part of an action plan agreed with carers.

3. What happens during the unannounced visit

Unannounced visits will mostly be undertaken by your supervising social worker; however, they can be completed by any social worker or manager from the agency. Workers will identify themselves with the agency's ID badge and it is expected that they will have access to the foster home at any time this is requested.

Unannounced visits should be timed for when the child looked after, or young person will be at home. This allows the supervising social worker to observe the relationship between the foster carers and the child or young person and speak to the child or young person about how they are getting on in the fostering household. Please note that this can be at times that might feel inconvenient for you, but it is important that we observe the fostering household during times that could be challenging and busy such as mealtimes time.

During the unannounced visit all areas of the home need to be seen, this includes all bedrooms, the garden and any outbuildings. The supervising social worker will be checking that standards are consistent throughout the home e.g. bedrooms for children looked after are of the same standard as other bedrooms within the foster home.

Where children and young people are present, whether looked after or children of the foster carers, their permission will be sought to view their rooms. Supervising social workers will explain the reason for the request and be clear that it is not about whether bedrooms are tidy but about home safety and safeguarding.

Although it is not necessary to complete a full home safety check during the unannounced visits, issues of health and safety will be checked and explored. For example, are windows and doors locked, are the stairgates and fire guards in place if appropriate, have children got adequate clothing, is there sufficient food available.

Any issues should be addressed during the visit and checked on the next visit.

If neither of the foster carers are at home when the unannounced visit is undertaken, then the visit will not be continued, even if other household members are at home. It will be recorded that the visit was attempted but a further unannounced visit will need to be undertaken.

If the foster carers are not at home and the child looked after or young person is home the SSW will check what the arrangements are for the supervision of the child or young person (e.g. alternative carer, or if there is none when the carer is expected home).

If it is not possible for the supervising social worker to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks, a further unannounced visit should be completed.

4. How will the unannounced visit be recorded?

If the unannounced visit was successful, the supervising social worker will complete the unannounced visit document that is embedded in the agency's electronic filing system, mosaic.

The write up will be signed off by a fostering manager and then shared with the foster carer.

If the unannounced visit was not successful, a case note will be added to reflect the attempt.

As part of the supervising social worker's supervision, fostering managers will track unannounced visits and discuss whether there have been any issues arising from them. Outcomes of unannounced visits will be part of the foster carers annual review.