

Foster Carer Manual



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1) Introduction

About this handbook

Central Bedfordshire Council's vision is to ensure that all children and young people in care are safe, secure and achieve their potential. Within fostering we aim to do this by providing and supporting safe, stable, and positive experiences of care. Our aim is to ensure every child has a secure identity by making the most of educational opportunities, being healthy and emotionally well as well as enjoying a network of social relationships within which they feel valued.

As foster carers you play a vital role in ensuring that children in care have a safe and positive experience whilst being cared for.

This handbook is therefore designed to make your role easier; to help you understand what support you can access from the fostering, adoption, and childcare teams, to encourage you to ask questions and to promote continued good practice developed through a combination of skill, experience, and knowledge.

Although for much of the time you will be doing the same things as parents do, you also need to understand that your task is different from theirs. As Foster Carers, you hold the children and the time and experiences you share with them, in trust for their future. As you would expect to protect you and your families and the children in your care, a whole range of standards apply.

Use this handbook to refer to regularly. It contains important information about your rights and responsibilities as an approved Foster Carer. Familiarise yourself with the contents section at the start, so you know what is covered should you need any information in the future.

This manual is provided electronically and is reviewed regularly. Throughout your career as a Foster Carer, you will receive information about changes and developments in the service by email.

Useful contact numbers

The Fostering Service

0300 300 8181

Out of hours- 0300 300 6292

Adoption team:

0300 300 8090

Court and permanency teams (North and South)

0300 300 6120

Family Support Team North

0300 300 8000

Family Support Team South

Telephone: 0300 300 8000

Children with Disabilities Team East

Telephone: 0300 300 8000

Children with Disabilities duty

Telephone: 0300 300 8314

Please note that not all workers are available to check their emails daily so if you don't get a response as quickly as you need, you may need to make a phone call or escalate to a manager.

Youth Offending

Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service covers Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils. A multi-agency team from Police, Probation, Social Services, Health, and Education.

Youth Offending Contacts

North Bedfordshire Youth Offending Team

Telephone: (01234) 276400

South Bedfordshire Youth Offending Team

Telephone: (01582) 818660

[Children's Services at Central Bedfordshire Council](#)

When you are approved as a Foster Carer you become part of the team around the child helping to support children and families in the Central Bedfordshire area.

[The Legal Framework in which Foster Carers work](#)

The task of looking after other people's children and young people is an extremely important one and not surprisingly, therefore, it is regulated by government legislation. Everyone involved in working with children and families in need are bound by this legislation, the most important ones being The Children Act 1989 and The Children Act 2004.

It is important therefore that you are familiar with this legislation so that you can understand the limits and extent of the power of the Council in relation to children and families. The National Minimum Standards with regulations on the placement of children in foster care, such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of the Fostering Service.

For the actual provisions click here:

[Children Act 1989 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Children Act 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[Parental responsibility](#)

Parents have a collection of duties towards their children that is called Parental Responsibility, sometimes referred to as 'PR'. Parents never lose parental responsibility for their child even when they share it with the Council when the child is made the subject of a Care Order. The only exception is when the child is adopted. As children grow older, they assume greater responsibility for themselves. Children and young people can also

become looked after and accommodated as part of a voluntary agreement (sometimes referred to as 'section 20') between the Council and the child's parents. Providing this type of accommodation, whether for a short period of time or on an ongoing basis can support families while they manage the challenges they may be facing.

Accommodation means arranging for a child to live and be cared for, for example in a foster home, residential home or with relatives or friends. Children are known as looked after and in care when they become the subject of a Care Order. The Care Order means that Parental Responsibility is shared between the Council and the parents to safeguard the welfare of the child.

More information about parental responsibility can be found here:

[Parental rights and responsibilities: What is parental responsibility? - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/parental-responsibility)

There are various Orders available to court to ensure children's needs are met and they are supported and protected from harm.

Care Orders

There are various types of Care Orders:

[Care orders \(childlawadvice.org.uk\)](https://www.childlawadvice.org.uk/care-orders/)

With a Care Order the court can say where a child lives and who they should have contact with.

Case Orders also emphasise the requirement for the Council to work in partnership with parents, Foster Carers, and the child to ensure the child's needs are met.

A number of other orders are available to courts:

- Police powers of protection (PPO)
Under this Order the police are empowered to take a child into police protection for up to 72 hours without a court order.
- Emergency Protection Order (EPO)
This is a short-term court order, issued with the aim of protecting a child from imminent risk of significant harm. Subject to certain exceptions, it can be made for a maximum period eight days, with a possible extension for a further seven.
- Supervision Order
This provides a legal framework in which work can be undertaken with a family without the more extensive powers of a Care Order.
- Interim Care Order
This Order gives the Council responsibility to look after the child or young person and determine where the child or young person will live.

This can be in a foster or residential placement or with parent(s). It means the Council gains parental responsibility and shares it with those who previously had it.

Full Care Order

At the conclusion of care proceedings (which aim to take place within 26 weeks) the court may decide that the only option available is for the child to remain in the care of the local authority under a Full care Order. The Local Authority shares legal responsibility for the child with the child's parents who have Parental Responsibility. A full Care Order lasts until the child is 18 but may be ended by the Court before then. The Local Authority decides where the child lives and with whom as well as having the final say on important decisions relating to the child.

A Care Order lasts until the child or young person is 18 years unless:

- The court revokes the order, or
- The child is adopted, or
- A supervision or residence order is made.

Placement Order – These give the Local Authority permission to place the child for adoption. They are normally made for younger children and seriously restrict a parent’s legal responsibility for a child. The Order can only be applied for once the social worker is certain of the long-term plans for the child.

Adoption Order – This Court Order completely removes a parent’s legal responsibility for the child and gives it to the child’s adoptive parent/s. It is only applied for after the child has been placed with prospective adopters and has resided with them for at least 10 weeks. They are permanent and cannot be discharged.

Discharge of a Care Order – The social worker may apply to Court to remove a Care Order previously made if satisfied that the child is presently well cared for and safe.

Other relevant legislation and regulation.

(iii) Fostering Services Regulations 2011

These accompanied by the National Minimum Standard form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of the Fostering Service and are used by Ofsted as a measure of whether we are meeting our duties and responsibilities and whether we are supporting foster carers to achieve the standards required. It is, therefore, important that you are familiar with this legislation and how it affects your role as a Foster Carer.

[The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

(iv) Care Planning Regulations

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (amendment) Regulations 2021 can be viewed here: [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

(v) Children and Families Act 2014

This Act aims to give greater protection to vulnerable children. It creates a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities. It made changes to the adoption system so more children who need adopting are placed into loving homes more quickly than is currently the case. It also includes measures which mean that children in care may choose to stay with their Foster Carers until their 21st birthday.

[Children and Families Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

The Care System and Care Leavers

The provisions introduced in this Act are:

- Contact and Residence Orders are no longer – in their place are Child Arrangement Orders
- The requirement to attend a MIAM (Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting) is now embodied in legislation the introduction of a 26-week time limit or completing care and supervision proceedings.
- The choice of children in care to stay with foster families until the age of 21.
- Clearer rights of young carers and parent carers to receive support from Local Authorities
- Reform to children’s residential care to make sure homes are safe and secure.

[Children and Social Work Act 2017 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Child Arrangement Orders

Under the provisions of the Children and Families Act 2014 Child Arrangement Orders have taken the place of Residence Orders and Contact Orders, but essentially are used to determine the same things i.e., who a child will live with and where s/he will live.

Definition of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

A special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement. It is a more secure order than a residence order because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so, however it is less secure than an adoption order because it does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parents. Anyone who has the leave of the court.

Who cannot apply?

A parent of a child may not be appointed as the child's special guardian.

Who can apply?

The following people may apply to be special guardians:

- Any guardian of the child
- Any individual who has a residence order or any person where a residence order is in force and who has the consent of the person in whose favour the residence order is made.
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for at least three years out of the last five years.
- Anyone with the consent of the Local Authority if the child is in care.
- A Local Authority Foster Carer with whom the child has lived for at least one year preceding the application.
- Anyone who has the consent of those with parental responsibility.
- Anyone who has the leave of the court.
- NOTE: You must be over 18 years of age and you can apply on your own or jointly with another person.

The court's decision

The court must decide that a special guardianship order is the most appropriate order to make in the best interests of the child. The court must consider whether, in addition to the making of a special guardianship order, a contact order should be made and whether any existing Section 8 Orders should be varied or discharged. The court must have the benefit of the Local Authority report dealing with the suitability of the applicant and any other matters that the Local Authority consider relevant before it can make an order (Children Act 1989, section 14A(8), (9)).

What is the effect of a Special Guardianship Order?

This order discharges any existing care order or related section 34 Contact Order. It confers parental responsibility, which can be exercised to the exclusion of any other person with parental responsibility apart from another special guardian.

Financial support

Foster Carers who seek to apply for an SGO in respect of a child or young person in the care of the Council may be entitled an allowance. This allowance is subject to annual review and agreed at a Resource Panel when approval is sought for carers to apply for an order. The allowance is reviewed regularly.

If you are contemplating applying for an SGO you should think about the following considerations:

- A Child Arrangement Order or SGO gives the holder day-to-day responsibility for the child or young person.
- Others with parental responsibility could still be involved in the child or young person's life. This shared responsibility can be both positive and negative depending on the relationships of all the parties.
- Many local authorities support the principle of SGO's because they take children out of the care system. This may have some obvious benefits for the child or young person but may leave the carer without the support they have been used to.

Making an order

Decisions are made at the final hearing. The court has a range of orders available, which are described in section The Legal framework in which Foster Carers work. The court will not make an order if there are any other means by which the child's welfare needs can be met.

In making the order the court must have considered:

- The child's wishes and feelings
- Their physical, emotional, and educational needs
- The likely effect of any change in circumstance by making an order.
- Their age, gender, background, and any other relevant characteristics
- Any harm suffered or likely to occur.
- Their parents' ability to meet their needs.
- All the orders available to the court under the Children Act.

Attendance at court

The child's Social Worker attends court on behalf of the Council. Children and young people do not normally attend but should be kept informed of the process, according to their age and understanding. This is obviously a very difficult time for children and young people as they hear about people, they do not know making decisions about their future. It is important that you understand this process so that you can help the child or young person.

Occasionally Foster Carers might be asked to attend court to provide evidence. If you are asked to attend court you can expect support and preparation from your Supervising Social Worker, the Social Worker, and our legal representatives.

Separated Migrant Children

You may be asked to provide care to a young person who is a separated migrant. These young people have often fled their home country to seek a better life in this country. They are usually identified by the police and supported by Children's Services for an age assessment to be completed. If a young person is deemed to be under 18 years of age Children's Services have a duty to provide accommodation.

Support will be provided by your Supervising Social Worker; an interpreter will be provided if the young person does not speak English. Once in placement, English lessons will be encouraged and appropriate training, advice and support will be provided to you to ensure you can meet the young person's needs.

The care plan that results from the core assessment must contain a note of the child's status as a separated migrant or trafficked child. The plan should include a description of how the child's needs in relation to their status will be met. This is to ensure that everyone involved in providing the child's care is aware of their status and enable them to provide for any needs resulting from it.

Separated migrant and trafficked children may have need for access to specialised legal advice and support. This could be in relation to immigration and asylum proceedings. If they have been trafficked, it may also be in relation to criminal or compensation proceedings. The plan should note where legal support is required and how it will be provided. The child's social worker or carer should accompany them in all meetings with legal professionals.

As for any looked after child, a health plan and a personal education plan should be produced as part of the overall care plan. The health plan should cover the children's state of health including physical, emotional, and mental health. This should include detail of how any psychological issues resulting from their experiences in their country of origin, on their journey to the UK or at the hands of traffickers will be addressed.

Traffickers may have sought to control the child by telling them that their family will come to harm if they do not cooperate. Trafficked children should be provided with ongoing support to help them cope with the emotional impact of this kind of coercion. This may require referral to specialist mental health assessment and treatment. The health plan should set out the objectives, actions, timescales, and responsibilities, arising from the health assessment.

The education plan should include a clear education pathway for securing high quality education provision in school or other education setting and details of support the child may need, for example, to learn English or where the child has a special educational need. 37. Looked after children must be given priority in school admissions, as outlined in the School Admissions Code. Social workers and carers should understand local arrangements for priority admissions where they live and ensure the child gains a place at the most appropriate school for them.

The local authority should also take steps to ensure robust procedures are in place to monitor education progress and a culture of proactive commitment to secure the highest educational outcomes for separated migrant or trafficked children and this is monitored through the virtual school in Central Bedfordshire.

Departmental policies and procedures

The Council interprets and implements legislation by putting in place policies and procedures.

Also, policies and procedures exist where arrangements need to be made but there is no specific legislative guidance, for example, the policy regarding bullying. It is important to understand the difference between legislation and departmental policy, in that we are bound by legislation, but policy is determined by local need and therefore can be changed and developed.

To view all policies/procedures in relation to fostering services, log on to:

<http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.procedureonline.com>

How to have your say

We believe that it is very important that Foster Carers have a range of opportunities to comment on how services for children and carers are organised. You are invited to do this in various ways:

- Feedback can be given through your Supervising Social Worker, team managers and Practice manager within the Fostering Service.
- Feedback about children's care plans can be given through the child's Social Worker, Team manager and Practice manager within the locality team.
- **Foster Carer Tea and cake- replace with Foster Carer Forum** - Foster Carers have an opportunity to meet with senior managers within children's services four times a year where they can discuss feedback on the service and help develop it, to share ideas and solve problems.
- Foster Carer Reviews - as part of your annual review you are given a form to complete. This form invites you to give feedback about the service you have received and ways the fostering service could be improved for you and/or the children or young people being looked after.
- Support groups - these groups give carers the opportunity to get together in a relaxed atmosphere to talk to other carers and share experiences regarding fostering issues. Representations from the group can then be passed to appropriate people via the forum. At the venue, there will be toys for children to play with. Support groups take place during the day in the North, South and middle of the County. There is a specific support group for intensive support carers.
- Foster Carer's newsletter - the Foster Carer's Newsletter goes out to all Foster Carers at least four times a year. Its prime objective is to develop a two-way communication between carers and the department. The marketing and recruitment officer and training officer welcome any comments or suggestions from carers for subjects to be included.
- Fostering Network - Foster Carers automatically become members of the Fostering Network when they are approved as Foster Carers. The fostering service pays for Foster Carers to have individual membership to Fostering Network.
- Central Bedfordshire Council also spot purchase support from the Fostering Network Advise and Mediation Service. If a problem has arisen while fostering this independent and confidential service can be accessed to offer Foster Carer support. If this service is required, the Supervising Social Worker will make a referral to the Fostering Network Advise and Mediation Service on your behalf.

The Fostering Service really values your feedback so please discuss any concerns or issues, initially informally with your Supervising Social Worker as this will give them the opportunity to resolve for you. If, for whatever reason, they are unable to resolve the issue, or you remain unhappy about any aspect of the services provided please escalate with

the support of your Supervising Social Worker to the relevant manager/practice manager. If, following this and the issue still isn't resolved then please use the comments, compliments, and complaints procedure, as set out below.

Complaints, compliments and comments

The Council encourage comments, compliments, and complaints.

- **Comments** are important because they help us deliver the service you need.
- **Compliments** are useful because they tell us when we are getting it right.
- **Complaints** are vital, however large, or small. They tell us that you, our customers, might not be getting the service you want.

Comments, compliments, and complaints should be sent to the Customer Relations Department.

How to complain

Further details for the Customer Relations Department can be found here:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Council/customer-feedback/comments-complaints.aspx>

Confidential reporting – also known as whistleblowing.

Normally concerns that you may have about the conduct of the Council, its officers, other Foster Carers, or other adopters, will be dealt with informally by your Social Worker or through the Complaints Procedure. There may, however, be an occasion when you have serious concern that falls outside the scope of the Complaints Procedure or any other procedures.

It is important that you feel able to voice concerns you have on a confidential basis and without fear of subsequent victimisation, discrimination, or disadvantage. This is based on the presumption that any disclosure is made in good faith. It is also important that your concerns are investigated by the appropriate people and not by an approach to the media. Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing.

Concerns covered by this policy include:

- Conduct which is an offence or breach of the law.
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice.
- Health and safety risks to colleagues or members of the public
- Damage to the environment
- The unauthorised use of public funds
- Suspected fraud and corruption
- Abuse or neglect of clients or colleagues
- Other unethical conduct.

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity. You should, however, be aware that any subsequent investigation of your concern(s), could lead to the person(s) against whom you raised the concern(s), facing disciplinary proceedings, court proceedings or their de-registration as approved Foster Carers or adopters (pre-Adoption Order). Under these circumstances you may be required to come forward as a witness.

The whistleblowing process is available here: [CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

The fostering task

Dictionary definitions of Foster Care

To **foster** means:

to nourish

to bring up with parental care, to nurse, tend with care.

to cherish
to encourage, help grow, and promote development.

To **care** means:
to feel concern, interest for
to provide food, have regard for, affection for.

What do Foster Carers do?

Foster Carers look after children or young people when they are unable to live with their own families.

As Foster Carers, your task is defined in part by the law, in part by children's services and in part by the circumstances that bring the child or young person into your home.

Whatever form of fostering you do, it is vital to remember that you are looking after children and young people who have lived in another family and who are bringing that (and invariably, other) history with them. They may have experienced a range of difficulties, but they will all be experiencing loss and disappointment that they can't live happily and securely with their own families like other children do.

This all means that fostering is a complicated and demanding task, requiring skill and knowledge.

Below are some ideas for the some of the responsibilities you have. The list will depend on what order the child came into care with and will differ from child to child. These responsibilities may also be split in relation to those relating to caring for the child and those relating to you as a foster carer, for instance record keeping and more legal arrangements such as insurance. Responsibilities include:

- To help the child or young person develop their own basic physical care.
- To monitor and respond to the child or young person's health needs.
- To help the child or young person develop self-esteem through presentation and appearance, including an understanding of personal possessions.
- To support the child's or young person's education, including working with schools as appropriate.
- To develop the child's or young person's understanding and acceptance of routines and structures.
- To develop the child's or young person's social behaviour and mindsets.
- To encourage the child or young person to manage their own leisure time, ensuring opportunities for recreation and leisure activities.
- To assist with the child's or young person's faith development in keeping with their own and their family's cultural and religious beliefs.
- To promote an understanding of the differences in race, culture, language and religion and a respect for those differences.
- To understand the legal requirements of foster caring.
- To hold a basic knowledge of first aid.
- To ensure that the child or young person is kept safe from hazardous substances and ensure general safety in the home.
- To work with Social Worker and other professionals, as required, including attendance in meetings about the child or young person.
- To provide information, in writing and verbally, to Social Workers and others, as required and to maintain a record of significant events.
- To ensure the best possible relationships with the child's or young person's family, including working with agreed contact arrangements.
- To provide adequate insurance.
- To ensure good communication with all concerned with the child or young person by providing information and attending meetings.
- To take up training opportunities. To be involved in a mutual support network with other Foster Carers, as appropriate.
- To manage personal finances and tax affairs, as appropriate.

- To seek help immediately with any concerns relating to fostering.

Why do children or young people need foster care?

Children's Services have a duty to help families in need and to enable children and young people to live happily and safely with their own family wherever possible. When children are unable to live at home, for whatever reason, they may come into care. There are a variety of reasons why children come into care, such as.

- The child's parents might have agreed to this, for example, if they are too unwell to look after their child or if their child has a disability and needs respite.
- The child may be a separated migrant child with no responsible adult to care for them.
- Children's Services may have intervened because they felt the child was at significant risk of harm. If this is the case the child is usually subject to a court-made legal order.

When a child comes into care your focus as a foster carer will be the child or young person and their needs. They are likely to have been removed from familiar surroundings. There will be considerable upset and confusion so they will need space and time to adjust. It is important that you provide this along with a clear message that you are available to them to talk and for comfort.

Placement Planning Meetings

A Placement Planning Meeting is the way placements should begin as it establishes communication between all the key people, who are then aware of all plans and the work that needs to be done to achieve those plans.

If a planning meeting is not arranged when a child or young person is placed with you, you should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker and/or the child's Social Worker and the meeting should then be held as soon as possible but within 5 working days.

The purpose of the meeting is:

- To set out tasks, aims and likely length of the placement – the care plan.
- To complete the placement agreement which sets out the day-to-day arrangements for the child or young person while they are being looked after.
- To exchange important information between all who attend
- To settle arrangements for contact and overnight stays.

Changes of circumstance

All carers must notify the Fostering Team immediately if there are:

- Any intended change of address.
- Any changes in the composition of the household, including relationship changes.
- Any changes in personal circumstances or any other event that could affect their capacity to care for a child or the suitability of their household.
- Any request to adopt a child or for registration for childminding or day care.
- Any circumstances whereby a member of the household has been subject to police investigation.

All carers are required not to disclose to any person any information given in confidence about the child or young person; this includes use of social networking sites or internet chat rooms.

Changes in circumstance of child or young person

The carer should keep the child's Social Worker informed about their progress and must inform the Social Worker immediately of any serious illness or significant occurrence that affects the child or young person.

Termination of placement

The carer must allow the child to be removed by the Council if it appears to Children's Services that the placement is no longer the most suitable for the child or the continuation of the placement would be detrimental to the welfare of the child.

Types of care

Emergency carers

These carers provide time-limited placements for children and young people in emergencies. It is the nature of emergencies that they can occur at any time. Emergency carers receive requests for placements from both the fostering duty team and the emergency duty team.

Short term carers

These carers provide short term care for children and young people, who are unable to live with their families. The placements can last from a few days, weeks, months or longer. The essential feature is that the placement is temporary whilst plans are made and carried out. Regular contact with significant people such as birth family is an essential part of short-term fostering. It is this contact which is the reflection of the partnership between parents, carers and the Council which will help plans for children and young people be most successfully achieved.

Short term carers also provide respite to other carers. Whilst we are aware that children and young people are unlikely to benefit from respite care within their foster placement, we are also aware that Foster Carers do sometimes need this support to ensure placements continue to succeed for all concerned.

Long term/ Permanent Foster Carers

These carers provide a permanent home to children and young people who cannot return to live with their family and for whom adoption is not the best option. The Fostering and Permanence Panel approves these placements if a child is 13 years of age or under. Over this age the Agency Decision Maker considers and agrees the placement.

Family and friends'/ connected persons/kinship carers.

These carers generally already know the children and provide placements for children unable to live with their birth parents but able to live within their extended family network, or with a friend of the family. These placements provide continuity of care, family, school and friendships, networks and sustain the child's cultural and individual identity.

Intensive support carers

These carers provide placements for young people generally 10+, who often have more complex needs and need a lot more supervision/support than other children in care.

Parent and child fostering

The parent and child fostering scheme is about supporting young parents and their small children whilst assessments are completed on the parent's ability to care for their child.

They will live Foster Carers for 12 weeks (sometimes longer). The carers will be key people in their lives, to give support, guidance, and practical and emotional support so they can build the confidence they need to continue to care for their child.

Supported lodgings carers.

The supported lodgings scheme is providing accommodation and support to young people, aged 16 – 17 years, who are not ready to live independently. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a room to a young person and offer practical and emotional support to help prepare them for independence.

Staying put carers.

A staying put arrangement is not the same as a foster placement. The young person staying put, who must be a former relevant child, is no longer looked after. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a personal advisor. The Foster Carer is no longer acting in the capacity of Foster Carer for that young adult; the foster placement becomes a staying put arrangement and is no longer governed by fostering services regulations.

Planning for young people leaving care will begin from 16 when they develop their Pathway Plan which covers all aspects of their journey into adulthood. For most young people this will involve them staying in foster care until they are 18, and for some it will be appropriate that they remain in their foster placement beyond 18. There is a separate staying put policy please click

here https://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_stay_put.html?zoom_highlight=staying+put

Placements

How placements are made

This depends on the circumstances of the child or young person who needs a foster placement.

For example, where a child or young person becomes subject of an Emergency Protection Order or a Police Protection Order, they need to be removed from their family immediately. Under these circumstances the out of hours worker (who receive a list of available carers daily) would contact an appropriate emergency carer or short-term carer or the Emergency Duty Team might contact you directly.

At other times the need is less urgent, and a planned short-term placement is required. The Social Worker involved with the child or young person's family makes a referral to the fostering service who will contact Foster Carers who may be able to provide a placement.

When a decision is made that children or young people cannot return to their original families then plans for their permanent care are made between the Child Care Social Worker and the Fostering and Adoption Teams. This is obviously a more complicated and lengthy procedure, requiring careful matching of a child or young person with a family, who will be able to meet their needs to adulthood.

Short-term placements

It is important to view these placements in terms of their purpose rather than their length. It is often very difficult to know how long a child or young person will be with you, but the placement is temporary whilst decisions are made, and plans are put into action.

If a child or young person can live with their family, then the Child Care Social Worker attempts to find a member of the child or young person's extended family or family friend who can look after the child. If this is not possible then the Child Care Social Worker contacts a Senior Manager to ask for permission to request a placement.

Discussion regarding the placement takes place between the Fostering Team and the Child Care Social Worker. When a placement has been identified and agreed by everyone the Child Care Social Worker makes practical arrangements with the carer to place the child or young person.

Permanent Placements

These placements include both fostering and adoption. Whilst there are obviously significant legal differences between a permanent placement and adoption the essence of these placements is about a child joining your family permanently.

Permanent fostering placements are made in two main ways:

- By already approved long-term carers (fostering or adoption) being matched with a child needing a permanent family

- By short-term carers applying to become permanent carers (fostering or adoption) for a specific child needing a permanent family.

Short-term Foster Carers who apply to be considered as long-term carers for a child in their care will need to first seek approval as long-term foster carers. This can be assessed as part of the Annual Foster Carer Review and presented to Fostering and Permanence Panel for consideration.

If you have approval as a long-term foster carer, you can consider being matched with a child long-term, which will involve the following process:

- Decision to proceed with matching should be agreed at the child's next Looked After Child Review
- Supervising Social Worker and Child Social Worker complete Matching Report, which will concentrate on your family in relation to the specific child and will need to look at how you are able to meet the present and future needs for the child, and how you might cope with potential difficulties. It is important to think carefully about the long-term implications for you and your family when you are considering applying to be a permanent carer. It is vital to remember that the department's obligation is to provide children with a permanent family most likely to meet their needs both now and in the future. So, your application must be considered alongside any other families who may be suitable for the child.
- Matching Report is presented to one of the following:
 - Fostering and Permanence Panel – for children under 13 years old
 - 13+ Panel – for young people 13 years and over
- If the Panel recommend the match and the ADM approves this, the child will remain in your care until they reach adulthood.

Information

For you: When you are asked to look after a child or young person it is vital that you have sufficient information to do this safely and appropriately. The depth of information you require will depend on whether it is a temporary or permanent placement.

There is usually a great deal of information about a child or young person who is being placed permanently and all of this should be made available to you as their permanent carer.

When a child or young person is accommodated on a temporary basis the fostering duty team gathers basic information, but this may not be all you need to know in order that the child or young person is safely placed with you.

The following checklist may help you to think of questions you should ask the Child's Social Worker, who knows the child or young person and the family:

- Child or young person's age / date of birth
- Child or young person's family address
- Brief family history, why the child or young person is being accommodated.
- Child or young person's GP
- Does the child or young person have any medical conditions e.g., asthma, epilepsy?
- Does the child or young person currently have any prescribed medication?
- Is the child or young person involved in any substance abuse?
- Are there any specific dietary requirements?
- Are there any specific self-care requirements e.g., skin or hair care?
- Are there any specialists involved with the child or young person? Are there any outstanding appointments?
- Child or young person's school – are they attending? Are there any difficulties with their education?
- Are there any safe-caring issues, for example has the child or young person been abused sexually, physically, or emotionally? Has the child previously made allegations?

- Do the parents know my address, telephone number – does this pose any risk to my family or me?

For parents: The 2004 Children Act requires local authorities to work in partnership with parents and so, where possible, children and young people are accommodated voluntarily. This means that parents have agreed to their child or young person being looked after. In these circumstances parents should be given information about where their child is living, including providing the address and the telephone number. This information is only withheld from parents when there is information that would suggest that this presents a risk to carers or the foster child. This should be discussed with the fostering duty team at the time of referral. Even when the child or young person is accommodated under a legal order the parent should usually know where their child or young person is living.

It is sometimes helpful for all concerned if you can meet the parents as this often dispels fantasies on both sides. Any parent can understand that having someone else looking after your child is very difficult to accept so feeling confident about the people, they are living with can aid in coping with this.

Children or young people moving into your home.

Armed with all the necessary information about the child or young person's past and present, you have the task of helping them settle into your home sufficiently well to enable them to eat, sleep and play appropriately and so develop and grow physically and emotionally.

During the early days, regular contact with the child or young person's Social Worker is important, because the Social Worker represents the bridge from the child or young person's past to the present. It is important that carers treasure and make the child's significant possessions available, such as toys, gifts, photographs etc., all of which will help them keep in touch with their past. Open and genuine interest in the child or young person's past, through attitudes to contact and previous carers is also crucial.

Resource and placement team

If it has been agreed that a child requires a foster placement, it is the responsibility of the Resource and Placement Team to search their data base of carers and liaise with the Social Worker, exploring all available options against relevant criteria to find a suitable foster placement. The resource and placement team will also search for respite placements when required.

Exemptions

The Children Act 1989 limits the number of children or young people Foster Carers can be approved for, to three. In exceptional circumstances such as emergencies or placing siblings, there is provision to extend approval for specific named children and this is called an exemption to the usual fostering limit.

Variation

There is provision for the fostering service to vary the approval of carers, for example regarding age range or number of children and type of fostering, for a limited period. This is called a variation and will need to be agreed by the Fostering Practice Manager. If the variation is longer than six days, then your approval will need to be reconsidered in a review.

Who else is involved with you and your foster child?

As a Foster Carer, you will become involved with many people who will support you and work with the children and young people to ensure their needs are met both now and in the future.

Supervising Social Worker

Every Foster Carer has a Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker is a member of the fostering team who will provide you and your family with support, advice and information through regular supervision throughout your fostering career. You should expect to receive regular visits from your Supervising Social Worker to discuss all matters relating to your fostering.

In Central Bedfordshire, we have established some minimum standards for the frequency Supervising Social Workers should visit carers.

From time to time your Supervising Social Worker may identify additional learning and development needs that could be better met by a mentor or training officer outside your normal supervision sessions. If this is the case, then your Supervising Social Worker will discuss this with you and together you will decide on the best way forward. They can then make the appropriate arrangements for you to take part in any relevant training opportunities and will check back with you to ensure that the additional support has met your needs (see training section for more information).

Your Supervising Social Worker is there to be helpful to all your family, and so can provide help and support to your children. Your children often spend a lot of time with your fostered children and so can be affected by fostering, both positively and negatively.

Whilst your Fostering Social Worker is primarily focused on you and your family, they must always keep the best interests of the child in placement as the focus.

Child's Social Worker

Every child or young person who is being looked after has a named Social Worker who is responsible for ensuring that the needs of the child or young person are being met.

The Social Worker will be involved in arrangements which relate to all aspects of the child's or young person's life, for example health, education, contact etc. You should talk with the Social Worker before making any significant changes to arrangements, particularly if the child or young person is accommodated.

There are minimum legal requirements for how often Social Workers should visit children or young people, in their placements.

Your relationship with the Social Worker is very important, as they represent the bridge between the child's past, present and future. You should share all information about the child or young person with the Social Worker, this will ensure that the best plans are made. Do not feel that you are telling tales, children and young people are not simply good or bad. Instead, they are generally reflecting what is happening for them at any particular time. At the same time, you should expect to receive all relevant information about the child or young person to enable you to look after them appropriately.

The Independent Review Manager (I.R.O.)

The independent review manager (IRO) is an independent person who has the duty to review the care plan of all looked after children and young people.

The review manager does this by gathering information and then chairing a meeting called a childcare review. In Central Bedfordshire, the reviewing service is part of the Professional Standards Service. In preparation for the review, consultation papers are sent to all people involved with the child or young person. This will give you the opportunity to share, with someone independent, information about the child or young person and about how the placement is working.

Therapist or counsellor

The child or young person placed with you may be working with someone who is helping them with their difficulties. This therapeutic work can take many forms and have different purposes.

As the Foster Carer, it is important that you have some understanding of this work, as it may very well affect the child's behaviour. Before the work begins it should be established what involvement you will have, this can vary from you and the therapist talking at regular intervals to keep each other updated, to you being part of the therapeutic

sessions. This will depend on the nature and purpose of the work but will always maintain an agreed level of confidentiality for the child or young person.

Personal Advisers

These workers have a significant role in working with all young people aged 16+. They will draw up a pathway plan, which is the plan followed by all those involved in working with the young person. The pathway plan aims to help the young person achieve independence.

CiCC - Children and young people's participation

The Council employs staff to give advice to looked after children about their rights, and to support those young people to be involved in shaping services and giving feedback. The service is available during office hours Monday to Friday. The person responsible for this work is called the Participation Officer and is based with the Looked After Children's team. The Participation Officer also supports and facilitates the Children in Care Council.

Children and young people can contact the Participation Officer about any part of their care or education or if they are interested in attending events or becoming a member of the Children in Care Council. The Participation Officer can also arrange independent advocacy for a young person to help them sort out any issues as quickly as possible.

Anyone can refer a child or young person to the Participation Officer, but they will only take up issues the child wants to pursue.

Children's Guardians

Since 2001 Children's Guardians have been employed by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), which is an independent body set up to work with all children and families who become involved with the courts.

A guardian is a person who is qualified and experienced in social work with children and families. The court appoints a guardian to:

- Safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- Give advice to the court about any application made to it
- Make provision for children to be represented in proceedings.
- Provide information, advice and support to children and their families.
- Recommend experts e.g., paediatricians, psychologists to help the court.
- Write a report for the court saying what would be best for the child, telling the court of the child's wishes and feelings.

Within care proceedings the Guardian must investigate all matters concerning the child and their family. In this they will get to know the child and their family by visiting them, attending meetings, reading reports, and talking to people involved.

If you are looking after a child or young person who is the subject of care proceedings the Children's Guardian will want to visit the child or young person in their placement. They will also want to talk to you about your views of the child or young person's future needs.

More information about the role of the Guardian is available here:

[Cafcass' role in care proceedings - Cafcass - Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service](#)

Meetings

Meetings with other professionals working with the children in your care are a useful way of getting groups of people together to make plans, resolve difficulties, and generally ensure good communication.

The following is a description of the purpose and organisation of most of the formal meetings you may be involved in as a Foster Carer:

Child looked after reviews.

Every looked after child or young person should have regular childcare reviews to ensure their welfare and ensure that plans are being implemented and to make decisions for the future.

Childcare reviews must be arranged at following intervals:

- Within the first four weeks of the child becoming looked after
- Then within the next three months
- Then within the next six months
- Thereafter every six months.

The childcare review is a meeting that includes a number of people including the Reviewing Manager, the parents, the Social Worker, and the carer. There are others who may also attend for example, the carer's Supervising Social Worker, a teacher, a Health Visitor, and other people working with the child or young person. Children and young people are positively encouraged to contribute to their review either by attending the review or by completing the consultation papers.

In preparation for the meeting, the views of all the people involved with the child or young person are sought using forms called consultation papers which are sent out in advance. These forms provide an opportunity to express views direct to the Reviewing Manager and should be returned to the Reviewing Manager before the review.

Reviews are often held in the carer's home, but an alternative venue can be arranged if it is inconvenient to have the meeting in your house.

If you need help to complete your consultation paper or have concerns about any matters relating to the review, you should discuss these with your Supervising Social Worker.

Permanency planning meetings

These meetings are held to plan how and when a child or young person will move from their short-term placement to their permanent placement (adoption or long-term fostering). The first meeting is usually chaired by the Manager or Senior Practitioner of the Adoption Team. It is attended by the short-term carers (if applicable) and their Supervising Social Worker and a Family Finding Social Worker from the Adoption Team.

PEP meetings

These meetings are school based meetings to plan for the education of a child in care by producing a personal education plan (PEP). They are a statutory requirement for children in care to help track and promote their achievements.

Disruption meetings and discussions.

These meetings are held when a placement cannot continue as planned. The meeting is chaired by a Review manager from the conference and review service. Anyone can request a disruption meeting or discussion, but these are usually requested by the Child Care Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker of the carers. The invite will include all the people who were involved in the placement to ensure that the meeting is able to work with first-hand information. The purpose of the meeting is to try to understand all the factors that led to the placement ending, both before and during the placement.

Mentors

Mentors are experienced Foster Carers who have been recruited and trained to offer an additional source of support and guidance when it is needed most. Having a mentor is mandatory for newly approved Foster Carers and is optional for approved carers. If you could like a mentor, your Supervising Social Worker will liaise with the mentoring team to discuss your individual needs before a mentor is allocated. The Supervising social workers who run the mentoring scheme have a leaflet about the scheme which can be sent to you on request, please contact your supervising social worker.

Record keeping

Logs

The Foster Carer Logs provide a record of important issues that have affected the fostered children in your care.

The purpose of Logs is to provide you with an official method of drawing our attention to important issues and for us to monitor important issues that are occurring in foster homes.

You should send electronic copies of you logs to your supervising social worker regularly, they will agree a frequency with you. These will be used to consider ways in which we can better support, equip yourself and monitor important issues, such as physical restraint and absconding.

Recording information

In the course of a fostering placement, you will accumulate a lot of paperwork relating to the child or young person placed with you. This will include placement agreements, reports, and records of meetings and reviews.

You are in a key position to gather information about the child or young person's health, development, schooling, any illnesses, or problems they encounter, as well as any achievements.

Most of you will find it helpful to keep records of how a child or young person is progressing to discuss with your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker. They are also useful to refer to at reviews and other meetings.

Children and young people can ask to see their records, so it is important to tell them that you need to keep records and why. They can also be invited to add their comments.

Professional boundaries

The increase in use of social networking sites presents challenges for Foster Carers in their role as child-care professionals. Foster Carers should remember that activity on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, may be covered by expectations in relation to Confidentiality and Safeguarding, but also by the need to maintain professional boundaries.

To protect against accusations of misconduct or of breaching confidentiality or safeguarding guidelines, Foster Carers are reminded that they should:

- Avoid any communication about fostered children in their care, including use of chat rooms.
- Carefully consider communication about fostering matters with those who are in conflict with the Council.
- Avoid communicating with service users or others on any matter related to the fostering activity you provide.
- Avoid becoming 'friends' with clients or their birth families on social networking sites.
- Avoid posting information about your fostering activity on any of these types of sites, including photos that include fostered children.
- Ensure that no confidential information, or other information that may identify a fostered child is posted in forums or chatrooms.

Foster Carers are strongly encouraged to raise any queries or concerns regarding these matters in their supervision. If you use your computer to record or store information on the child or young person placed you, you should check it conforms to the requirements of data protection- such as having password protection on documents.

How to record

- Foster care diaries should be used for dates of meetings, appointments etc. Confidential information should be recorded in your logs and sent electronically password protected.
- Try to ensure that you record what has happened on the day of the event, so it is fresh in your mind and as accurate as possible.
- Avoid the use of slang or jargon.

- Be clear about the difference between facts and your opinion – both can be recorded but it must be clear which is which.
- If you have difficulties expressing yourself in writing, you should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker so that you are able to find alternative ways of ensuring necessary information is recorded.

What should be recorded?

It is not necessary to write lengthy reports. Foster Carers lead busy lives and simply do not have time to do this. It is important to record significant events or circumstances that affect the safety or wellbeing of the child or young person. Information about the child or young person that affects you and your family should also be recorded.

Things you might record include:

- Details of the child or young person's behaviour that causes concern.
- Details of improvements, progress, achievements, and funny stories
- Details of any accidents or injuries or occasions where restraint has to be used.
- Dates and details of any health appointments, illnesses, and hospitalisations
- Information about education, concerns, achievements, contact with school.
- Dates and details of contact visits, how they went, who was there, the child or young person's reaction.
- Dates and details of overnight stays away from the foster home
- Decisions reached at meetings with Social Workers and others involved with the child or young person.
- Details of requests for extra support and any stresses that this placement is placing on you and your family.

When the child or young person leaves your care

Fostering Network advises carers to keep a record of the names of children and young people placed with them, the dates they arrived and left and the date they passed on their records. The Data Protection Act (1998) does not allow carers to keep records containing personal information about children and young people after they have moved but does allow carers to access information they have written, should they need to do so in the future.

Further information: Fostering Network has produced a helpful guide: [Record keeping | The Fostering Network](#)

Confidentiality

Information you are given and information you record should be kept separately for each child or young person you are looking after. This information is confidential and must be kept in a safe secure place. Your Supervising Social Worker can provide you with a lockable box or filing cabinet if you do not have one.

Access to records

This refers to the access Foster Carers have to information held about them by the Council.

Written information is kept securely electronically on a secure database, which has restricted access.

Carers' files are updated by the Supervising Social Worker and usually contain basic information such as:

- Your approval details.
- Your assessment including references and annual carer review papers.
- Supervision records
- Training record
- Letters
- A running record of your contact with your Fostering Social Worker/childcare Social Worker.

There is also a confidential section. This contains information given by a third party who has requested that the information remains confidential.

Information about children or young people placed with you is kept separately on the child's electronic file.

If you wish to have access to your records, please contact your Supervising Social Worker.

Accidents

It is essential that Foster Carers record any accident in which a child in their care is involved, how the accident occurred and what action they have taken. It can sometimes be difficult to remember or explain the signs of an injury weeks after.

Always tell the child's Social Worker and/or the person with parental responsibility (if appropriate) as soon as you can and submit the electronic record by email to the Child's social worker and your supervising social worker.

If the foster child has a more serious accident or sudden illness and requires medical or hospital treatment, consent to treatment will be required, so always have the relevant medical consent form readily available.

You must notify the child's Social Worker as soon as any medical treatment has been arranged for the child. You also need to inform your Supervising Social Worker.

If the accident occurs outside normal office hours notify the Out of Hours Service on 6292.

Restraint and physical intervention

To help children to manage their behaviour it is important to establish positive relationships and communication between children and Foster Carers. Wherever possible, positive techniques based on distraction from negative behaviour, or rewarding and encouraging positive behaviour should be used, as these are proven to be more effective, particularly where a child's understanding and control over their behaviour is impaired.

Allegations against Foster Carers

Foster Carers are vulnerable to allegations because:

- Fostering is a task that is open to constant public scrutiny.
- Fostering can add to all the other stresses of family life.
- Looked after children and young people are vulnerable and need the highest standards of care. Their experiences of family life may lead them to misinterpret or misunderstand what Foster Carers do or say.
- You, or another member of your family has abused the child.
- Allegations can come from a variety of sources such as schools, Social Workers, parents, neighbours, and of course, children and young people. All these people must be listened to as they all play a part in the lives of our children.
- Sadly, not all allegations against Foster Carers are unfounded and it is for this reason that they must all be taken seriously and investigated appropriately.

Financial implications

Following the strategy meeting where a decision has been made to either remove any foster children or where there are no children in placement and the household has been placed on hold, the Foster Carer will be paid the fee element of Payments for Skills only for the suspended placement/s. This will continue to be paid until the resolution meeting has decided about the return of the child or continuation of fostering.

In circumstances where future fostering is to be decided by the Foster Panel the fee element will be paid for a maximum period of three months, payment beyond this point will only be made in exceptional circumstances and will be at the discretion of the Practice Manager, Fostering and only in exceptional circumstances.

Independent Support

Once approved, all carers can access independent support and advice from the Fostering Network. This provides, amongst other benefits, a 24-hour telephone legal advice service. Fostering Network has also produced useful advice which is available here:

[Allegations | The Fostering Network](#). Foster Carers can also access independent support from Fostering Network Advice & Mediation service to help them through the investigation process and be available to attend foster panel with you, if required. To access this service, contact your Supervising Social Worker.

You may wish to talk through the allegation with a trusted friend or fostering colleague but choose carefully as there may be implications for confidentiality.

The making of an allegation is traumatic for all concerned and you will feel a wide range of emotions. You may wish to seek medical advice which could include counselling.

Investigation process

When information regarding an allegation is received it will initially be referred to the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) for an initial consultation. The LADO will consider whether further fact finding is required to consider the scope of the Managing Allegations Procedure. If it falls short of the Managing Allegations procedure, there may still be a role for the LADO to provide advice and support. Where the matter constitutes a conduct, standards of care issue or concern about the quality of care and practice, the manager should follow the appropriate disciplinary procedures and let the LADO know of the outcome.

When an allegation has been made the following procedure will be followed.

A discussion (known procedurally as a '**strategy discussion**') will take place between the fostering service, the children's team, and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The information is assessed, and a decision is then reached (regarding any further action, if any, required) by the professionals involved based on the nature and seriousness of the allegation.

If it is decided at this stage that there is sufficient concern to instigate child protection procedures, information gathering will commence and the outcomes shared at a strategy meeting to which carers are not invited. This meeting will include the police and other agencies and should be held within 2 working days. The meeting is chaired by a Practice/Team Manager.

The meeting will decide if further investigation is required and if so whether it will be done jointly with the police or as a 'single agency investigation' by the children's team. A Social Worker independent to the case will be identified to conduct the investigation unless there is good reason why it should be done by the Child's Social Worker.

The strategy meeting will also consider what, if any, are the risks to other children in the household, including your own children. In situations where a carer works with or is involved with groups of children the meeting must also consider whether any risk is posed to them. Only if there is any risk to those children will the employer or organisation be informed about the allegation.

Once this meeting has taken place the investigation can start. If the Police are not involved you will immediately be informed of the allegation, the process that will be followed and this will be confirmed to you in writing. You will also be given a copy of the procedure for dealing with allegations by your Fostering Social Worker. If the Police are involved, however, we may not be able to tell you about the allegation until they have conducted their interviews. Further meetings may take place to consider the findings of the investigation and at any point if there is evidence to show that the allegation is false the investigation can be ended, and the allegation withdrawn.

When all the investigations have been completed a 'resolution meeting' will take place. This should take place within two weeks of the conclusion of the investigation unless there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay.

In general terms there are three potential outcomes to any investigatory process:

- The allegation is **Substantiated** – the range of concluding actions may include criminal prosecution, report for the Foster/Adoption and Permanency Panel, referral to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Occasionally allegations may be substantiated but the assessed level of risk allows less formal concluding activity.

- The allegation is **Unfounded** – The term ‘unfounded’ means that there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made, or there is evidence to prove that the allegation is untrue. There is the possibility that the allegation may be malicious (see below), but it might also indicate that the person making the allegation had misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what he/she saw or was not aware of all the circumstances.
- The allegation is **Unsubstantiated** – An unsubstantiated allegation means that there is insufficient identifiable evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence. In these situations, it will be necessary for careful professional judgments to be made on ‘the balance of probabilities.

The term ‘malicious’ implies that an allegation, either wholly or in part, has been made with a deliberate intent to deceive or cause harm to the person subject to the allegation. For an allegation to be classified as malicious, it will be necessary to have evidence to prove the intention to cause harm. Care should be taken in dealing with such allegations as some facts may not be wholly untrue. Where there can be sufficient confidence to conclude that an allegation has been made with malice then it is appropriate for the LADO to refer the matter to the Police for their consideration.

Where the allegation is either substantiated or unsubstantiated the fostering/adoption service shall assess the situation with regards to the carer’s continued suitability to care for a child or children. Where there are concerns regarding suitability a report must be presented to the respective panel to review and make recommendation about future status.

Suitability Process

The Foster Panel must consider a report of the allegation investigation no later than 3 months after the date of the resolution meeting. The Foster Carers will have received this report at least 4 weeks prior to the panel meeting to enable comments to be made and for them to attend panel if they choose.

Panel can recommend the following options:

- Continue as approved.
- Change of approval
- Re-assessment of carers
- No longer suitable to foster.

If the outcome is ‘no longer suitable to foster’ and the Agency Decision Maker agrees with that recommendation the carers will be notified and given 28 days to make representation. This can be done in one of two ways:

- Either through application to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of decision (fostering agency then must consider this review information when making the final recommendation)

or

- You may make representation to the foster panel with information provided by yourselves for them to consider.

Support from Fostering Service

The Fostering Service understands that carers naturally feel anxious when an allegation is made. Your Fostering Social Worker is there to offer you support throughout the process. They will not, however, be able to comment on the nature of the allegation or say that they believe your description of events. What the Fostering Social Worker can do is to listen to your feelings and concerns and keep in regular contact. They will keep you informed of progress of the investigation as far as possible and try to ensure that your views are represented. The Fostering Social Worker’s priority is always the welfare of the child and information shared by carers will be recorded and placed on file.

Conclusion

As a Fostering Service our priority is to protect children in care and those carers who look after them. It is not possible to eliminate all risk but by offering good support, supervision, and training to carers, and developing comprehensive Safer Caring Plans, the risks can be reduced. However, when an allegation is made the affects can be devastating for all those concerned, irrespective of how long they may have fostered.

There is further information about the allegations process in the Good Practice Guide included in this handbook. It is expected that you discuss the allegations procedure with your Fostering Social Worker and arrange to attend the Safer Caring training course.

Support during and after allegations

- If an allegation is ever made against you, whether it's groundless, it is obviously a very upsetting experience.

Anti-discriminatory Practice

This refers to a way of working that seeks to ensure that no person receives less favourable treatment because of culture, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability, or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be justified.

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to working with parents, children, carers, and Social Workers to share different perspectives and values on the best interests of our looked after children. This helps us to challenge discrimination and develop good practice.

We are opposed to all forms of direct and indirect discrimination and expect carers to challenge appropriately any discriminatory behaviour and language that affects the life opportunities of children placed with them. This includes bullying, racism or discriminatory behaviour and language affecting the quality of education or health care provided to the child.

Culture, values and religion

Everyone has their own culture. Culture has nothing to do with the colour of our skin. It is about the influences around us that make us the people we are and what we do, how we live our lives.

Tolerance is the key.

- To respect not just other people's culture and heritage but their beliefs and religion as well
- To accept that, just because our own culture is special to us, it may not be special to others.
- To learn, and understand, other people's lives and influences.
- To accept this knowledge and way of life, whilst not necessarily agreeing with everything it involves.

As a Foster Carer, it is important you accept that people have different ways of living which are equally valid to your own and be prepared to find out about these to help the children and young people you look after.

Values

Most people agree that it is important to have a set of values or beliefs to help guide us through life. Our values and beliefs help us decide what is right or wrong and how to behave in certain situations.

We get our set of values, the dos and don'ts of life, as we grow up. Some we get from the family we grow up with, some we get at school, some we learn at play and others we learn from friends and other people who influence us.

Some people get their set of values from religion. That is what religion is, a set of beliefs or values that influence a person's life and behaviour. Religion is personal to everyone. There may be others who share these beliefs and values. There will certainly be others who do not do so. There will be others who have no religion at all, but they will certainly have their own beliefs and values.

Beliefs and religion

Religion means different things to each group of people who share in an organised 'established' religion. Within each religion, there are likely to be different sects with different beliefs and levels of commitment.

A religion needs continuity and rules to give it strength. It also needs to grow and change to respond to the ideas and needs of new generations and an ever-changing world.

Identity

Understanding the meaning and significance of identity is very important to you as carers, because you are looking after children and young people whose identities are likely to have been disrupted because of their no loving with their birth families, the place where identity is first developed.

Therefore, it is important to think about a child or young person's identity, the things that make them who they are, and work with others to preserve these as far as possible.

This includes a whole range of things such as:

- Contact with family.
- Maintaining links with friends and community
- Maintaining the child or young person in their school
- Maintaining membership of clubs etc
- Encouraging knowledge and understanding of family history
- Encouraging knowledge and understanding of cultural and religious history.

This means that every child or young person placed with you arrives with a history that needs to be valued and an identity that needs to be strengthened.

Life story work

This is vital work which gives children and young people a chance to learn about and record their past life and their history. It should help them to understand the things that have happened and why they happened on the basis that we all need a logical life-story to become healthy adults.

Carers can contribute to this work in two important ways:

- By careful recording during placements – On-going life work
- By sharing in the making of a life-story book

On-going life work

Every child or young person who comes to live in your family arrives with a past, then you become part of their present and future. Whatever time they spend with you becomes a chapter of their life. During their stay with you a child or young person will have a great number of experiences, some good some not so good, but each of these are part of the jigsaw that will go towards making them the person they will be.

This means that when the child or young person first arrives you should be thinking about recording information or keeping things on their behalf. The placement with you is a part of their life that will go on to become part of their history which could be lost without your care. You should record all information about:

- Health for example, developmental changes, illnesses, accidents, treatments
- Education for example, nurseries, playgroups, schools, school trips, achievements, difficulties
- Significant events for example, birthdays, holidays
- Significant changes for example, when a care order is made, or final family contacts.

As well as writing this information you may also gather mementos or photographs that relate to the information e.g., a certificate from school, the day they learnt to ride a bike, their birthday party, first day at senior school, shells from the beach etc. It is helpful to record other funny stories, incidents or memories that help to add detail and fun to the child or young person's stay with you.

And finally, always provide a photograph of yourself and your family! If the child or young person moves on from your family, you will need to discuss it with your Supervising Social Worker or the Child Care Social Worker how, where, and by whom all the above information should be kept.

Life-story books

Many children or young people whose lives have been disrupted will need help to piece together all that has happened. This is often done by creating a life-story book which tells the child's story. It is usually done by a

Social Worker. who needs your support in understanding that the process can be very unsettling for a child or young person. Whilst children and young people are making sense of all that has happened, they may become angry and upset. You need to work alongside the Social Worker currently, so you are aware of these developments. The life-story book should provide a rounded account of the child or young person's life, including as much detail as possible.

For further information:

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) has published a very useful book: Life-story Work by Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker.

Black and other ethnic minority children and young people

The care needs of looked after black and other ethnic minority children are, in principle, no different to the needs of any child in the care system. The general welfare of all children is rooted in the knowledge and confidence that they belong to a family or network that loves and cares for them.

However, many Foster Carers, in an effort not to discriminate against black children, fall into the trap of believing they should treat every child the same. It is important to acknowledge that everyone is different, and it is those differences that make people special and important. Difference should be celebrated not denied. The best approach is to treat everyone fairly and according to their needs.

It is also important to understand that basic racial and cultural needs are not automatically met by simply placing a black or dual-heritage child in a black household or white children in a white household. In looking after black and other ethnic minority children Foster Carers need to be able to understand the importance of:

- 1) The child's physical well-being – hair, skin, and dietary needs.
- 2) An ability to recognise and respect cultures and belief systems, which might be different to your own.
- 3) An ability to help children and young people value their past, present and future.
- 4) An understanding of racism.

Dual-heritage children and young people

If the mark of a healthy adult is his strong personal identity, that is, knowing who you are and where you come from, then the task for dual-heritage children growing up presents a special challenge.

These children have two cultural identities that need to be understood and accommodated. Also, when these children are brought up in a society where one culture is more prominent than the other, this imbalance can result in the loss or denial of parts of their cultural identity.

This means that the task of caring for these children lies in helping them to restore the balance so that they can celebrate both their cultural identities. This involves ensuring that children and young people are exposed to information and images from both cultures to which they belong.

What carers can do to strengthen cultural identity.

The following offers some practical ideas about ways a carer can encourage cultural identity:

- Seek advice and learn about special dietary rules.
- Seek advice and learn about personal needs, like hair and skin care.
- Seek advice and learn about the rules of religious observance.
- Involve yourselves and the child with other families of the child's heritage.
- Encourage the child to keep contact with members of their original family and community and to introduce you to these –wherever appropriate.
- Provide the child with positive images by finding books, posters, videos, music etc in which children and adults of ethnic minorities are featured.
- Learn about the historical foundations of the child's culture and share these with them.
- Contact the local community and take part in events etc with the child.
- Be aware of the damaging effects of racism – both in the language you use and the attitudes you have.

- Help the child to work out ways of dealing with racism – by developing an understanding of racist attitudes and practising the words they might use to counteract them.
- Encourage the reading of literature from their culture.
- Encourage the watching of both factual and fictional films and television programmes about and for ethnic communities.

Bullying

All forms of bullying are unacceptable. Evidence demonstrates that bullying can have a huge impact on a child or young person's outcomes. Carers, teachers, and Social Workers need to ensure that children and young people understand that bullying will not be tolerated, and that support will be given if they are experiencing bullying.

Looked After Children can be particularly vulnerable to bullying due to their circumstances. It is therefore essential that everyone who has responsibility for caring for Looked After Children can recognise and deal with bullying if it occurs.

What is Bullying?

There is not one single answer to this question as there is not one universal definition. Most definitions do however contain the following elements.

- Intended to cause hurt either emotionally or physically.
- It is repeated over time.
- There is an imbalance of power.

Each school has a policy that refers to how they respond to bullying; this should also contain the school's definition of bullying.

What types of bullying are there?

Listed below are some of the different methods of bullying. The methods of bullying include.

- Verbal, name calling, threatening, being insulting, sarcasm, persistent teasing and making offensive remarks and humiliation,
- Theft, taking or damaging belongings,
- Rumours, spreading lies about someone or people close to them,
- Physical, Kicking, punching, hitting, pinching, and other forms of violence, cyberbullying, the misuse of information technology to cause upset or distress, particularly through mobile phones and the internet,
- Isolation/indirect, consistently leaving people out, turning groups against an individual.

Above is an explanation of the methods that may be used to bully somebody. The motivation for the bullying can be prejudice driven. Below are some examples.

Racial or cultural bullying

Any incidents of racial bullying at school should be reported to and recorded by the school. It should have specific policies and procedures for dealing with racial incidents. If a fostered child or young person experiences racist bullying in placement or in the community, the incident should be reported to the child's Social Worker or your link worker or a note made in your logbook.

Homophobic/ sexual bullying

If incidents of sexual bullying, take place at school the same procedures for all bullying should be followed. Obviously, any sexual assaults should be reported to the police. Carers should be aware of and carry out safe caring procedures and involve all household members in creating and understanding their own safe caring family policy. This includes encouraging diversity and difference at home. Challenge the use of homophobic language and seek the appropriate advice for any child that is raising questions about their sexual orientation.

Disability or SEN

This can be a result of the prejudices and misconceptions held by people. Be aware that children and young people with disabilities may often find it more difficult to articulate their experiences about being bullied and so may need added encouragement and support. Find out about your child or young person's special needs, there are usually support groups that can help with information. Help the school to understand about the special needs and encourage the other children at school to help. For advice, contact DIAL (Disability Information and Advice Line) on 01302 310123, www.dialuk.info. This is a national organisation run by and for disabled people.

Appearance

People can be bullied for looking a certain way. Examples are wearing glasses, being short, being tall, being overweight, being underweight, being pretty or maybe having the wrong colour hair. These are just a selection of the sorts of reasons. It is important to remind children and young people that people can be bullied for anything. It is not really about the young person/child but more about the person exhibiting the bullying behaviours. It is important to remind people it is these physical factors that make them who they are, and they should be proud.

What are possible signs of being bullied?

Any child or young person can be bullied and at any age. You may notice sudden changes in the child's behaviour which may indicate that they are being bullied. For example, they might: -

- Be unwilling to go to school or be feeling ill in the morning.
- Returning from school hungry (because food or lunch money has been taken)
- Have possessions go missing or having belongings damaged or destroyed.
- Have unexplained bruises, scratches, or cuts.
- Become withdrawn or distressed.
- Start stammering, lack confidence, stop eating.
- Have nightmares, cry themselves to sleep.
- Begin to bully other children or siblings.
- Become aggressive and unreasonable.
- Present a variety of physical symptoms – fits, faints, vomiting, hyperventilation, headaches, stomach aches, bed wetting.
- Display depression and anxiety
- Suddenly stop accessing the internet
- Refuse to say what is wrong or give improbable reasons to explain any of the above.

It is important to remember that these signs may be an indicator of bullying, but they also might be an indicator of something else that is upsetting a child.

What can parents' or carer's do about bullying?

If you do think a child or young person is being bullied, then it might be beneficial to follow the steps below.

Step 1 - Talk it over together.

Start by asking the child or young person some questions to find out more about what is happening, for example: "Who have you been playing with?" "What did you enjoy at school today?" "Did something happen today that you didn't like?" If after asking some basic questions you still feel concerned encourage discussion about what is happening. It is very important that you ask the child or young person what they want to happen and that you listen to what they have to say. It may be that you do feel that it is necessary to take actions which go against their wishes, but it is important where possible that you're honest about this and explain your reasons. People that have been bullied are often have been made to feel powerless and it is important that we try not to repeat this pattern. It is important to offer reassurance and explain that bullying can happen to anybody, and it is not their fault.

Step 2 – Speak to the relevant people.

After chatting with your child, if you do feel there is a problem and you think that bullying is happening at your child's school, you should contact their school. Explain the situation clearly and calmly as it might be the first time

the school has heard of the issues. The school will have a policy for dealing with reports of bullying behaviour. It depends on the size and the phase of the school as to who is the best person to speak to. A class teacher or form tutor might be the best person to speak to in the first instance and then if you feel the issue is not resolved your next step would be to contact somebody in a more senior role. The child or young person may be able to suggest someone within the school who they trust and want you to approach. You may want to consider contacting the designated teacher for looked after children.

Step 3 – Agree an action plan.

It is important that when you do have the opportunity to meet that you can agree a plan of support for the child/young person in question. Within the plan it will be useful to acknowledge who has responsibility for specific actions and to agree to jointly monitor the situation. In most cases, by working with the school, bullying problems can be resolved quickly. It may also be appropriate to include actions and responsibilities for the young person. For example, that they will speak to specific teachers, they will speak to someone at the end of the day or maybe that they will keep a record of any incidents that happen. If you do not feel that the school is responding to your concerns in the most effective way, then you need to communicate this to that person and be very clear about what aspects you're not reassured about. If you are still concerned, then speak to somebody else within the school. It is also an option to speak to the school's governing body as they may be able to offer support to resolve the situation.

Although the steps above are mainly focused on school they are still applicable where bullying is a concern within other settings

What if your child is bullying?

There are many different reasons why children or young people might start exhibiting bullying behaviour:

- Some children and young people may turn to bullying as a way of coping with a difficult situation.
- Children who are the victims of abuse themselves can take out their feelings of humiliation and anger on others.
- Those who want to be top dog may use aggression and violence to command obedience and loyalty.
- Some may not have learnt other ways of interacting with others.
- Perhaps they are copying siblings, family members or others that they admire.
- Perhaps they are encouraged by others to use bullying behaviour.
- Maybe they don't realise that the behaviour is wrong or the damage they are causing to their victims.

It is important that children and young people who use bullying behaviour learn that this behaviour is unacceptable and that if they continue then there are consequences. Unchecked bullying also damages the individual who learns that violence, aggression, and threatening behaviour is a successful way for them to get what they want.

What carers can do?

Talk with the child or young person. Explain that what he or she is doing is unacceptable and makes others unhappy. See if they have any ideas about why they use these behaviours and what might help them to stop. Maintain interest in their progress.

Show the child how they can join in with others without bullying and give plenty of praise and encouragement when the child is kind and co-operative to others. If a young person/child feels that the bullying behaviour gives them status, they may need help to find other ways to positively get status from peer groups. Suggestions for this could be extracurricular activities, student Council or possibly sport activities. Talk about how friendships can be formed and what the basis of those friendships can be.

Contact the school and talk to the designated teacher for looked after children or the child's class teacher. Discuss how you and the school can stop the child from using these behaviours. Work with the school and child/young person to develop positive strategies to put in place when they feel angry or provoked. Provide them with a range of options

for reacting to difficult situations and find ways of ensuring young people understand and can communicate what it is they are meant to do. Look at each person as an individual and make sure what you are suggesting works for them.

Create opportunities for them to shine and reward positive behaviour.

Changing a child's name

It is vital for a child to be aware of their identity, and their birth name is a major part of their identity. Foster Carers are not allowed to change the surname, or the forename of a child placed with them. Where a child is old enough to take this decision themselves and wishes to do so, carers should seek advice from the child's Social Worker or their Supervising Social Worker.

Adoptive parents have the right to change the name of an adopted child after the Adoption Order is granted by the court, although this is strongly discouraged to positively reinforce the importance of their birth family identity.

Child development

It is important to understand normal child development, so that you have appropriate expectations and are also able to recognise any delays in development.

Human development moves progressively in a number of different areas, known as physical, emotional and thinking. One area can proceed while others lag, for example we see children and young people who are physically developed while emotionally they are delayed. This can be the case for many looked after children and young people who have suffered disruption and trauma. This obviously presents considerable difficulty for carers, who need to take account of delay whilst encouraging age-appropriate development. Sometimes you need to allow time for the child to catch up.

It is important that you record developmental information, as it will be used in making planning decisions and for the child or young person's life-story book.

If you feel the child or young person you are looking after is significantly delayed, you should discuss this with their Social Worker and your Fostering Social Worker so that a more detailed assessment can take place.

Child protection

Children's Services departments have a duty to protect all children or young people in the area who are in need or at risk.

If a child or young person is believed to be at risk of significant harm, which includes neglect, unexplained accidents or injuries and physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, this must be investigated urgently.

The investigation, which sometimes includes the police, aims to find out about the child or young person's situation. This is done by interviewing all the people involved with the child. A decision is then taken about how to proceed and if there is continued cause for concern, a child protection conference is held.

Child Protection plans

The purpose of making a child subject to a Child Protection Plan is to formally recognise concern for that child and to formulate a plan to protect the child from further abuse. The plan identifies tasks for all the agencies involved with the family.

Families know that their child is subject to a plan, and they are encouraged to engage with the support plan. Child protection review conferences are held at arranged intervals to monitor any progress made.

Attachment

Attachment and looked after children and young people.

Many of the children and young people you look after will have experienced traumas, whether a physical or psychological wound or hurt, these traumas will have affected their ability to form secure attachments. Such traumas might include:

- A difficult birth
- Extended or repeated separation from parent or caregiver
- Emotional physical neglect
- Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- Inconsistent or inadequate parenting.

This is particularly significant for Foster Carers as by the time the child is placed with you, he/she will already have a blueprint for how parent/child relationships work. This blueprint may be demonstrated in behaviour and responses that seem unreasonable. However, in the context of the child or young person's experiences in their birth family, these behaviours and responses may represent how they survived either physically or emotionally.

This means that children or young people who have experienced insecure or disorganised attachments will need considerable help to let go of their previous learning and accept new ways of relating to people who try to get close to them. They will often behave in ways that make you feel that they do not want your care, and this may lead you to feel you cannot continue to care for them. However, this will only serve to confirm their original blueprint.

This is what makes looking after children or young people with attachment difficulties so challenging. It means that you need to maintain your attitude and support to protect you and your family. You may also need more specialist help which you should talk to your Supervising Social Worker about. See also Behaviour which provides some useful ideas and strategies to help you cope.

This has only been a brief overview of attachment and if you are interested in finding out more the following books by Caroline Archer, are very readable:

“First Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts – Tiddlers and Toddlers” Forward by Dr Vera Fahlberg, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers “Next Steps in Parenting the Child Who Hurts - Tykes and Teens”. Forward by David Howe, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Babysitting – making adequate childcare arrangements

There is no law governing the age at which children can be left or the minimum age of babysitters, it is a matter for parent or carer's judgement. However, the law does intervene if the child is harmed or injured.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) suggests that babies and children should never be left alone and children under 13 years left only for short periods. In deciding whether to leave a young person of any age on their own, you need to consider the needs of the fostered young person in your care and the level of risk involved. You may also need to discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker.

We all acknowledge that fostering can be very demanding and so it is important that you have opportunities for relaxation by going out regularly. You may also wish to attend training in the evenings. However, it is important to make adequate arrangements for the children you are looking after.

As part of the assessment process, we encourage prospective Foster Carers to identify a couple of ‘back up’ carers who can support them in an emergency or for occasional babysitting/day care. There is no need for these people to be assessed as we expect approved Foster Carers to use the professional judgement and only leave children with people, they themselves trust. If your back up carers are likely to offer regular, ongoing support then the fostering service would require them to undertake a DBS check.

It is a good idea to find one or two reliable friends or relatives who are available to baby-sit and who could also be available in an emergency. These people may need to have a DBS check. Your Supervising Social Worker can make the necessary arrangements.

You may be accustomed to allowing your own older children to baby-sit your younger children. Although this might work very well for your own children, you should think about whether they can cope with the responsibility of looking after your fostered child. You should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker.

Sleepovers

Government guidelines recommend that there is no statutory duty for DBS checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child may stay overnight. DBS checks should not normally be sought as a precondition of an overnight stay. Any overnight stays should be discussed with the Childs SW if it is not included within your delegated authority document that you are able to authorise these.

The fostering network has produced a helpful guide around delegated authority within the following document:

[Handbook cover.indd \(thefosteringnetwork.org.uk\)](#)

Behaviour

When a child or young person joins your family, it is important to remember that they have lived in a different family with many different rules and routines, and a whole range of experiences that will affect the way they respond to this new situation.

The rules and routines in your home are familiar to you and seem perfectly logical but they are new to your newly placed child or young person. This means that it is important that you make your expectations clear, for example should the child ask for a drink, or can he help himself? Think about how your household runs and what rules and routines are important. Your own children can often be helpful as they know your family from a child's point of view.

So, before you think about the behaviour you might encounter it might help to think about information. That is, providing the child with enough information to fit in to your house and getting enough information about the child to help you understand what difficulties they may have in adjusting to your household.

A way of communicating with the child is using the PACE model and, in this instance, particularly the curiosity element. An example could be "I am noticing that you seem to be a little quieter than usual, I wonder what is different today. I wonder what might be going on for you? This approach allows the child to know that you are noticing that there is a change, and you are offering them a safe space to express themselves.

A detailed picture of the child's behaviour might quickly suggest a solution, and if not, will still give you an accurate account to share with others.

Another useful way of analysing behaviour is the ABC method:

- A Antecedent – what happens before the behaviour?
- B Behaviour – what happens?
- C Consequences – what happens because of the behaviour?

As you get used to thinking in this way it might be helpful to share the process with the child or young person so that they begin to be aware of their behaviour and its consequences.

Consequences

Focusing on continuous positive regard is often more effective than constantly highlighting unacceptable behaviour. When negative behaviour gets the most attention it reinforces that to the child. If you focus on positive and try to ignore negative within safe reason, children usually respond better.

Give yourself time to think about the most appropriate consequences to behaviour. It is very easy to give a punishment in the heat of the moment and then realise that it won't work. If you are cross with the child or young person, it is a good idea to have some time away from each other for a little while to give you time to think.

Make consequences fit the behaviour. Natural consequences are usually the best teachers. Sometimes having the child remain close to you is better than sending them away as it indicates that you are with them in the moment and that they are safe, but that behaviour is not acceptable, and this has been voiced. Sometimes older children might be encouraged to think of their own consequences and so you can agree something by negotiation.

Ideas for encouraging positive behaviour.

Remember that many of the children or young people you are looking after having experienced failure in one way or another, so it is important to notice the good behaviour and reward it with praise. If you only tend to respond to bad behaviour and steer clear when your child is playing happily, they will soon learn how to get your attention.

A worry box is a useful way of helping children and young people to express their worries. The box should be kept in an accessible place and anyone in the family can write something and post it in the box. The carer oversees opening the box and there is a clear understanding about which messages can be shared with everyone in the family and which should be kept between the writer and the carer. You are then able to find a convenient time to talk with the child about their worries.

Consequences don't always have to follow bad behaviour. You can have encouraged consequences such as suggesting that when the child has finished tidying his room you play a game together.

Prevention / diversion are excellent ways of avoiding problems and rely on you knowing the child or young person and their behaviour. If you can see something brewing, find your child something different to do. If you know situations cause difficulty think of other ways to tackle them, for example consider the seating arrangement around the tea table if that is a place where arguments start.

Use games to encourage the smooth completion of chores. For example, ask "can you finish putting your toys away before I finish tidying the kitchen?" Try counting while the child goes to do something, like getting ready for bed and then get them to beat their record the next night – children love competitions!

Enjoy fun times together with your fostered child, so that you can both experience one another positively. Children and young people appreciate adult attention and when this is positive it can have an important ripple effect on your relationship.

Use surprising responses, including humour, to diffuse situations. Humour, not sarcasm, is a very helpful technique to divert or take the heat out of a situation and will help you if you are feeling cross. Sometimes when children or young people are shouting at you talking in a very quiet voice can make them stop to hear what you are saying.

Managing behaviour is at the centre of looking after children and young people and can be a constant challenge. You need to use a wide range of techniques and strategies to help you to cope. You should use the experience you have gained as a parent but don't be worried or disappointed if these methods aren't as successful. Your own children are wanted, loved and secure, whilst this may not be the case for fostered children and young people. This crucial difference is what makes fostering different from parenting.

If you are having difficulties managing a child's behaviour you should discuss it with your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker. The Fostering Network booklet, Managing Behaviour offers lots of useful advice.

Corporal/physical punishment

All carers must not administer corporal/physical punishment to any looked after children (Corporal/physical punishment includes smacking, hitting, shaking, etc.).

Belongings

Foster children may bring items of clothing, toys or other possessions with them when they come to stay. These belongings may not seem very valuable to an adult, but they may be precious to a child and therefore should be treated with respect.

Remember the child will have been separated from their family and familiar surroundings and placed with strangers and what may seem an unimportant item to you may be a child's most treasured possession.

It is good practice to keep an inventory of young people's belongings and add to this when items are purchased.

When children move on from you, their belongings should be packed in bags, suitcases or holdalls. Bin bags must not be used under any circumstances.

Children who foster – Kids Who Share

We are learning more and more about the significant role your children play in the fostering task. Often your own children spend a lot of time with children and young people placed in your care, sharing their toys, their bedroom and most importantly their parents.

The fostered child can sometimes physically or emotionally target your own children. This can happen because your children represent you and your controls which the fostered child may resent or perhaps because they are jealous of all that your children have.

At the same time, many Foster Carers report that their children benefit in many ways from being part of a foster family. However, there may be times when your children need some additional support and your Supervising Social Worker, who will know your children, is available to offer this.

The Fostering Service run regular activities for children who foster where they can meet other children who foster, undertake fun activities and share their experiences of fostering.

Clothing and equipment

Some children arrive at your home with their own clothes and equipment. You are entitled to be supplied as soon as possible after the child arrives with whatever else the child may need. An initial clothing grant is available. Clothing bought for the child belongs to the child and goes with them when they move placement or go home.

It is important to consult with the Fostering Service before making any purchases for which you expect to be reimbursed as all expenses and purchases need to be agreed by the department beforehand.

At the time of approval there is an expectation that Foster Carers will have ensured the safety of their premises with regards to the age range approved for, i.e., for a baby or young child you would need carbon monoxide detector, socket covers, safety locks, etc. All foster homes should be fitted with a smoke alarm. More details can be found in the Health and Safety Standards and the financial guidance document. .

Basic initial equipment which can be reimbursed by the Fostering Service for the foster child includes For Babies

Cot	Highchair	Mattress
Stairgate	Duvet or $\frac{3}{4}$ blankets	Sterilisation kit
Duvet cover x 2	Sheets x 4	Fireguard

Pram/Buggy

Car seat

For Older Children

Bed

Pillow

Wardrobe

Chest of Drawers

Bedding, 2 changes

We also recognise that children with disabilities, special needs or from ethnic minority groups may need additional equipment. Please discuss this with your supervising social worker if you think this might apply.

Confidential information

As Foster Carers, you will be given information, both verbally and in writing about the children placed with you and their families. You need this information so you can provide appropriate care, but it is vital that you treat this information very carefully. The information belongs to the child or young person and their family, you hold it in trust, both when you are looking after the child and afterwards.

Delegated Authority

The Decision Support Tool is to assist Social Workers, parents, Foster Carers, and young people to talk to each other about delegated authority. It can help to prepare for the initial Placement Planning meeting and each subsequent review when the Placement Plan is considered. It is an aide to good practice in working with delegated authority. It does not replace or replicate the Placement Plan which is the legal requirement for this purpose. The required content of the Placement Plan is set out in Schedule 2 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010; relevant statutory guidance is in Chapter 2 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.

It is based on consultations which suggest that the areas covered are those where it is particularly important to have clarity. The aims are to ensure that the Placement Plan:

- Is viewed as a living document that can change over time.
- Is as clear and inclusive of parents and Foster Carers as possible.

The *Decision Support Tool* is not a definitive list of tasks and responsibilities: over the life of a child's placement with Foster Carers, other areas will inevitably arise and require clarification and not all the elements that are included will apply to every young person. In addition to preparing for planning meetings and reviews, its other uses are:

- To assist Supervising Social Workers to prepare fostering applicants for the tasks in foster care and to assess their needs in relation to the *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*
- For childcare, Social Workers to use with parents who need additional support to understand delegated authority. The leaflet *Information for Parents about Delegated Authority* may also help with this.

Clarifying who is best placed to take everyday decisions depends on many factors: the young person's age, views, legal status and care plan, the parents' views and the experience and the views of the Foster Carers.

Piercings

Ear piercing has always been popular amongst adults and children alike. More recently however, piercings in other parts of the face and body have become common. Children and young people in your care cannot have a piercing without the consent of their parents or the Social Worker depending on their legal status.

Tattoos

There has been an increase in the popularity of tattoos amongst young people who are attracted to them because they are seen as both fashionable and an expression of their individuality. It is illegal to be tattooed unless you are over 18 years.

Changing a child's name

It is vital for a child to be aware of their identity, and their birth name is a major part of their identity.

Foster Carers are not allowed to change the surname, or the forename of a child placed with them. Where a child is old enough to take this decision themselves and wishes to do so, carers should seek advice from the child's Social Worker or their Supervising Social Worker.

Adoptive parents have the right to change the name of an adopted child after the Adoption Order is granted by the court, although this is strongly discouraged to positively reinforce the importance of their birth family identity.

Children and young people with disabilities

Like most children, most children and young people with a disability live with their parents. However, parents may find the task of looking after a child or young person with a disability considerably more difficult, both practically and emotionally. For this reason, the child and his or her family may require the help and support of local services.

Under the 1989 Children Act, the Council has a duty to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need. In the first instance, the Council is required to set up a register of all the children and young people with disabilities in the area. Parents can choose whether to register their child or young person. The register helps the Council provide and plan services for children and young people with disabilities. From April 2011 Councils have a duty to provide parents of children with disabilities with access to short breaks from caring.

Services for children and young people with disabilities

The Council provide services for children and young people with disabilities through the following teams:

- Child with Disabilities teams - these contain Social Workers who work with children and young people and their families. They assess need and set up packages of support, based on the level of need. These packages can include a whole range of help including practical support using sessional workers or short breaks.
- Residential Units that provide short breaks for disabled children and young people
- Long Term Residential Provision for disabled children and young people
- Community Services providing short breaks.
- Specialised services for children and young people with disabilities are also provided through education and health. Details of appropriate help and assistance can be obtained through the child or young person's school and GP or health visitor.

Caring for a child or young person with a disability

There are some important practical considerations in caring for children and young people with disabilities:

Practical matters:

- Some children or young people will need special equipment – for instance bath aids or special chairs. If you are looking after the child or young person for a short time, they can bring this equipment. If the placement is to last longer than necessary equipment will be provided
- Children and young people with disabilities who need nappies or disposable pads will have them delivered to their home.
- The blue badge parking scheme allows parents and carers to park in designated areas, to make shopping etc. more accessible to people with disabilities.

Safe caring:

Disabled children or young people may be more vulnerable to abuse because of:

- The intimate nature of their care for example, bathing, toileting etc
- The fact that they may have a number of different carers.

- They are more dependent.
- They may have communication problems and can't tell anyone.
- They may have mobility problems and can't remove themselves from situations.

The following provides some guidelines for providing intimate care:

1. Treat every child or young person with dignity and respect and ensure their privacy. One person alone carrying out intimate tasks can achieve this. If two people are required, e.g., for lifting, it is important to always maintain the child or young person's dignity.
2. Involve the child or young person in their own intimate care as far as is possible. Try to avoid doing things for the child or young person that they can do for themselves. If the child or young person can help you with any tasks, encourage them to do so. Support the child or young person in anything they can do independently. If the child or young person is completely dependent on you, talk to them about what you are doing or about to do, and tell them why you are doing it. Wherever possible give choices
3. Be responsive to the child or young person's reactions. Check that you are caring for the child or young person in ways that they are used to.
4. Never do something unless you know how to do it. If you are not sure how to do something, ask. Training is available for a whole range of tasks.
5. If you are concerned about something report it. It is important that you let the child or young person's Social Worker or your Supervising Social Worker know if:
 - a. You accidentally hurt the child or young person while caring for them,
 - b. The child or young person seems unusually sore or tender in the genital area.
 - c. The child or young person appears sexually aroused by your actions.
 - d. The child or young person misunderstands or misinterprets something that you do.
 - e. The child or young person has a very emotional reaction without apparent cause.
6. Encourage the child or young person to have a positive image of their own body. Your approach to the child or young person's intimate care can send important messages about what their body means, so your attitude is very significant.
7. For people caring for a child or young person with a disability, a range of specialist training is provided, for example safe moving and handling. You should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker
8. If the child or young person placed with you requires medical care, you will be trained in this appropriately.

Disability living allowance

How much do you get?

Disability Living Allowance has two parts called 'components':

- A care component - if you need help looking after yourself or supervision to keep you safe.
- A mobility component - if you can't walk or find it very hard to walk, or you need help getting around.

Some people will be entitled to receive just one component; others may get both. The care component and mobility component are paid at different rates depending on how your disability affects you.

How it's paid

Disability Living Allowance is normally paid directly into any account of your choice which accepts Direct Payment of benefits. This might be a bank, building society or other account provider.

You may be able to get someone else to collect your Disability Living Allowance if you wish. For help with this please contact your bank, building society or other account provider. If you would like more information about how you can be paid by other means, please contact the office dealing with your claim - details are in the 'Rates and how to claim' section.

Benefits and Foster Carers

The interaction of fostering allowances with welfare benefits is a complex area and the rules are open to differing interpretation by the offices that administer benefits or tax credits. One of the main problems is related to remunerative work and how foster caring may be treated as remunerative work by some offices and not by others. This can cause problems with how the fostering allowances you receive may interact with benefits to which you may be entitled.

Tax information can change regularly and therefore instead of including information about the current situation here which is likely to be out of date quickly, we have included a link to the current guidance from fostering network which is updated regularly:

[Tax FAQs | The Fostering Network](#)

It is always important to get advice from the relevant office which pays or administers your benefits or tax credits if you are considering becoming, or are already, a Foster Carer.

If you have any difficulties, or need advice about your benefits, you can contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Department for Work and Pensions also produces a wide range of information fact sheets, providing details on individual benefits.

The Fostering Network also offers a helpline – 020 7401 9582 or [email info@fostering.net](mailto:email_info@fostering.net).

Foster Carers who are receiving adoption, SGO or residence order allowances should seek advice on how these allowances can affect their benefits or tax credits.

Disability Living Allowance

This benefit can be claimed for a foster child providing the birth parents are not already claiming. It is possible to transfer the claim by mutual consent. If the child receives the higher rate of mobility component, the Foster Carer can claim exemption from road tax if they use their car for the benefit of the child. It should be used to meet the day to day needs of the child arising from their disability and to enhance their care. Also see section 3.4.4 – Disability Living Allowance.

Useful local numbers

Bedford CAB	01234 354 384
Leighton Buzzard CAB	01525 373 878
Dunstable CAB	01582 661 384
Amphill CAB	0844 771600
Biggleswade CAB	0844 771600

Local Department for Work and Pensions/ Local Councils:

Housing/Council Tax Benefits –	
Bedford Borough Council	01234 267422
Central Bedfordshire Council	0300 300 8000

These benefits are subject to change. For up-to-date information please contact your local Department for Work and Pensions or visit <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/directgov>.

Discounts for Foster Carers

The Marketing and Recruitment Officer is constantly working to secure further discount schemes for Foster Carers. These are often seasonal locally i.e., free child entry to theme parks, etc. However, in partnership with Kaarp Benefits, we provide a comprehensive discount package for everything from car/home insurance to theme parks and loans.

This is constantly changing and improving. For further information contact the Recruitment and Retention Officer on 0800 300 8090 or log on to: kaarp.co.uk – Username – CBEDFORDSHIRE password – BENEFITS.

Library services

As a registered Foster Carer, you can have an additional Library Card to borrow items for the children in your care.

To obtain a Foster Carer Library Card you will need to visit your local library, complete a form and show staff your Foster Carer I.D. card.

All charges are the same as a standard Adult Library Card except that you can request children's books free of charge.

Education

Before being taken into public care, children may have experienced a chaotic lifestyle, which may have impacted on their educational attendance and attainment. Looked After Children typically experience multiple changes in the significant adults in their lives whether this is their Social Workers or Foster Carers, plus the homes that they live in.

Recent developments in national policy have placed the educational achievements of children in public care as a key priority in care planning. The progress and achievements that this group of children make is one of the main focuses of inspections of schools and of Local Authorities Children's Services Departments.

Central Bedfordshire Council values, encourages, supports, and celebrates educational achievement. It is recognised that a secure and high-quality educational placement is key to a young person's access to better life chances. Continuity of education is important for all children including those who are looked after by the Local Authority. Central Bedfordshire Council seek to place and maintain children in public care in Local Authority mainstream and special schools, as part of the overall inclusion policy.

Although Foster Carers do not have parental responsibility for children that they care for they are essential in ensuring that our children achieve their full educational potential. In terms of educational law, Foster Carers are considered parents, as they have day-to-day responsibilities for the child. This is important in defining the relationship between carers and educational professionals.

Background

In the first instance, if appropriate, we will attempt to maintain the child in the school that they attended before coming into care. This is not always possible. Therefore, a key objective based on recent legislation is to ensure that children in public care are admitted to the school that best meets their needs. If a child's needs are met, then they should be able to achieve in line with the expectations that the school have of them. In order to make this happen there are a number of statutory duties which apply to children in public care and their education.

The most important is that the child is in school. If a Looked After Child is not in school, then they cannot learn. Therefore, there is a statutory requirement placed on schools to admit Looked After Children

‘Non-Routine Admissions’

Outside the normal admission round a maintained school must admit a looked after child if requested to do so. If the admission authority refuses, then the Local Authority (who has care of the child) can direct the admission authority to take the child even if the school is full. Where the admission of a child into an infant class would breach infant-class size legislation, a looked after child can be admitted as an ‘excepted pupil.’ Improving the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children Statutory guidance for Local Authorities, DCSF (March 2010)

There is a maximum time limit of twenty days within which a Local Authority must secure an educational placement for any pupil in public care. Normally, this will be a full-time place in a local mainstream school unless the circumstances of the child make attending a full-time or local school unsuitable.

All adults involved in caring for a child, including Foster Carers, are legally considered to be corporate parents and are expected to act as a champion for the children in their care and advocate for their needs. As a rule of thumb, they are expected to want the best for children in care and expect them to be treated, as they would want their own children to be treated. This involves all educational decisions including the choice of school and exclusions.

Expectations of Central Government to raise the achievement of Looked After Children Care Matters and the Children & Young People’s Act (2008) placed a number of statutory requirements and guidelines on Local Authorities about the educational provisions provided for Looked After Children. Namely:

- Arranging high quality early years education for all 3/4-year-old Looked After Children as part of their care plan.
- We are expected to attempt to maintain a child’s school placement whenever possible and in the case of children in Years 10 and 11 we must maintain their GCSE placement at all costs.
- There is a suggestion that no child in care should travel for more than 45 minutes to get to their school from their foster home.
- Providing a Personal Education Allowance (or equivalent) for each looked after child at risk of not reaching expected standards.
- Providing individual tutoring for Looked after children where appropriate.
- Ensuring that attendance is good, and that exclusion is minimised.
- Making provisions for looked after children excluded from school from first day of exclusion.
- Providing training for school governors
- Ensuring that all Authorities have a Head of Virtual School for Looked After children to oversee the education and achievement of all looked after children as if they were in one school.
- The role of the Designated Teacher was put on a statutory footing for every maintained school.

Expectations of Foster Carers to support education.

- Foster Carers should attend training on education which is designed to support the achievement of Looked After Children
- Foster Carers will be assessed on their ability to support education in their annual reviews and the Foster Carer Induction Standards
- Foster Carers should expect, support, encourage and ensure that children in care attend school and achieve the best results they can. This includes encouraging them to remain in education or training until the age of 18+ (i.e., to attend a school-based post 16 or further education course at college and make an application for a university post if appropriate)
- Foster Carers should make themselves known to the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children in school and arrange and attend any introductory meetings. This includes when a child is newly placed with carers but remains in their previous school.
- Foster Carers should attend parental consultation and target setting meetings, open evenings, and options evenings as well as sports and other activities to which parents are invited and the child is taking part in
- Foster Carers must contribute to the Personal Education Plan and attend any meetings to draw up the plan or review it

- Carers must plan to get the child to school safely and on time in a safe and age-appropriate way. When a Foster Carer is transporting a child to and from school, mileage can be claimed after the first three miles of each journey.
- Foster Carers are expected to support and encourage the child to complete homework.
- Foster Carers should ensure that young people are able to access resource materials, I.T. and libraries to support learning.
- Foster Carers must alert Social Workers and / or the Head of the Virtual School if there are any concerns about education.
- It is expected that Foster Carers will encourage Looked After Children to attend breakfast clubs, after school clubs, extra-curricular & extended school activities, revision sessions, 1 to 1 tuition opportunities, taster and summer courses as appropriate.
- Foster Carers must ensure that Looked After Children have the correct uniform and equipment.
- Foster Carers are expected to ensure that the child has lunch and can buy break time snacks and drinks as is customary for the school.
- Foster Carers must ensure that there is full school attendance wherever possible.
- Foster Carers who have school aged children should take their annual holidays in the school holiday times.
- Foster Carers should challenge any school exclusion that does not seem fair and inform the Head of the Virtual School of any such occurrence.
- Carers must not enter into voluntary agreements with the school to allow the child to miss parts of the school day unless agreed by the Social Worker
- Foster Carers may wish to stand as parent governors at the school attended by the children that they foster and would be encouraged to do so.

IT and safeguarding children & young people on the Internet

Foster Carers are often concerned about ensuring that the children that they look after are safe on the Internet and this can result in stopping or significantly restricting a child from using computer technology in the foster home. In the world, that we now live in this will have a significant impact on the ability of a child to succeed at school. Increasingly, schools expect their pupils to access the Internet to complete homework and revise for examinations. Often schools set their homework on school websites.

We therefore expect that Foster Carers will allow the children in their care to access the Internet from home. We accept that they are likely to be able to access this technology in after school study clubs but note that many children do not like to do this, as it is something that singles them out from their peers.

To ensure that a looked after child is safe, we would remind carers that children and young people must learn to apply the stranger danger rule in this new context and must never give out personal details to anyone that they meet online. Schools will already be making this clear, but like all best learning it will be more effective if it is reinforced at home.

Safety tips for using computers and the Internet:

- Install parental locks and with the social workers agreement do regular checks on the young person's devices.
- Teach the child not to give out personal information about themselves to anyone else.
- Teach young people to be as careful about strangers online as they should be in the street.
- Be open with them, talk about how they use the Internet.
- Keep the computer in a communal room and not tucked away in a bedroom.
- Let the child know that they can come to you if they feel uncomfortable with anything that happens on the Internet.
- Teach children and young people not to meet anyone they have met on the internet face to face without your permission.

School admissions and attendance

It is a legal requirement that all children attend school on a regular basis.

Every child aged 5 to 18 is entitled to a free full-time education. Children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 30 hours of free nursery or pre-school education.

The Department for Education and the Local Authority monitors school attendance.

For all children / young people, stability is the key factor to educational success. Research has shown that there is a very close link between educational achievement and improved life chances for Looked After Children.

Therefore, wherever possible, a child / young person's current school placement will be maintained, even if this means that additional transport costs are incurred. In general, it is recommended that a child should not travel for more than 45 minutes to get to and from their school.

Trying to maintain the school placement is especially important if:

- the placement is only short term and there is an intention to return the child / young person to their family
- the placement itself is recognised as a short term one while the care plan is being established. Under such circumstances the Local Authority will try to maintain the current school placement whilst long term plans are being established.
- the child is in Years 10 or 11 and is studying towards GCSE or equivalent examinations.

Under the national Schools Admissions Code of Practice that is updated annually, it is recommended that Looked After Children are given top priority in the over subscription criteria. This has been fully implemented in the two Authorities and also applies to Academies. Children in public care are given top priority in the lists of children admitted to our schools at the traditional transition times. Admissions arrangements are monitored through the Admissions Forum and Corporate Parenting Panel, which is presented with an annual report from the Head of the Virtual School.

When a child / young person is taken into care and / or a change of school placement is necessary, the Local authority is required to establish a new school placement within 20 days.

Children who are looked after must be admitted to the selected school even when the school roll is full, provided the school can best meet the child's needs. This must be done without any hindrance.

Any refusal to admit the child will be legally challenged.

In-year admissions and transfers may occur at any time in any of the following situations:

- When a child enters school for the first time
- When a child/young person transfers to Middle and Upper School at the ages of 9 or 13. The process of making the application for a school place occurs in the autumn term preceding the move
- When a parent / carer / Social Worker requests a change of school
- When a child / young person changes their address
- When a child / young person has special educational needs, which necessitate a change of placement or school to meet their needs.
- When a child / young person has been permanently excluded from their existing school.

Special Educational Needs

The Statement of educational needs was replaced as part of the implementation of the new Children and Families Act 2014. More information is available here: [Children and Families Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://legislation.gov.uk)

The provisions in Part 2 CFA 2014 include:

- Replacing old style Statements of Special Educational Needs with a new birth to 25 Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHC Plan), offering families personal budgets to buy the services they require to support their child's SEN.
- Improving cooperation between all the services that support children and their families.

- An obligation on LAs to publish information about their “local offer”. The local offer is the services the LA expects to be available for children and young people with SEN.
- Central Bedfordshire Local offer is available here: [Central Bedfordshire SEND Local Offer](#)

School Action

This category includes those children for whom the school has a concern but can support the child / young person within the daily management of the classroom. The needs of these children can normally be addressed by the teacher, but they must make a formal assessment of the progress that the child makes.

School Action Plus

This category includes those children / young people for whom there is a greater concern and for whom more professionals are involved. Often this includes children in public care as a Social Worker is also involved in making plans for the child. The class teacher in consultation with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) should construct an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This identifies specific actions and targets to improve the child / young person’s learning and achievements. The school may also seek advice from outside agencies.

Education and Health care plans (EHCP’s)

For those young people with exceptional and long-term SEN, the school, carers, or the Social Worker can request a statutory assessment, which may lead to an Education and health care plan. In the case of children in care this cannot be done without consulting the Social Worker and best practice suggests that the Virtual School Head should also be consulted. The Local Authority must work to statutory time limits for the completion of the assessment. More information about EHCP’s is available here: [Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\): Extra help - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[What is an Education, Health and Care Plan? \(EHCP\) \(educationadvocacy.co.uk\)](#)

Alternative learning settings

Most of our children will be educated in mainstream or special schools in local communities. However, there are a handful of children whose needs are best met in an alternative provision. These children are still legally entitled to an education that meets their needs and Local Authorities will seek alternative venues to provide a learning environment that meets their specific needs.

Expectations of Schools in respect of looked after children.

- Every school must have high expectation of what any pupils in care can achieve in terms of the progress that they will make and must ensure that Looked after Children are entered for all the assessments that their peers are.
- Every school must appoint a Qualified Teacher as a Designated Teacher for Looked After Children. They are formally responsible for the progress that a child makes in the school and should advocate for the child’s needs. When a child is placed and needs a school place, the Foster Carer should make an appointment with the Designated Teacher
- Schools must keep a register of all Looked After Children
- The Designated Teacher is required to co-ordinate the completion of the educational aspect of the PEP within statutory time scales. The PEP and the review document are a statutory document for the school just as it is for Children’s Services
- Every school should also have a designated Governor for Looked After Children
- Schools are required to contribute either in writing or by attending the childcare review meetings.
- The Governing Body must receive an annual report from the Designated Teacher.

Early years & foundation stage

- Looked after children aged 3 years and above are entitled to 15 hours (3 Sessions) of Early Years provision e.g., nursery school, nursery classes, pre-school playgroups.
- Looked after children accessing this provision should have an Early Years PEP
- Early years settings should use the Foundation Stage Profile to monitor the progress of a looked after child.

- Early years settings should ensure that the relevant information is shared with the receiving Lower School at the time of transfer.

Exclusions

Local Authorities are required to monitor and report all exclusions to Councillors and the Department for Education. A separate report is generated that focuses on the exclusion rates of Looked After Children. The figures of exclusions in any school are reported in any inspection and are viewed in a poor light. In fairness schools usually try very hard to support a Looked After Pupil so that exclusions are not needed, but on occasions they do happen.

The exclusion of a Looked After Pupil should be the exception and can only be considered if all other avenues for addressing the issues have been exhausted. It is therefore very important that strategies are put in place at an early stage by schools, carers, and other key professionals to avoid exclusion. A child / young person's particular needs may be identified in the PEP process. A review of a PEP can be called at any time if there are concerns about the progress that the child is making so it is an effective mechanism for refocusing the resources that can stop exclusions from happening.

If a child / young person is excluded from school this can often be traumatic for the child and carer. If carers have concerns that a Looked After Child in their care might be at risk of exclusion, they should contact their Supervising Social Worker and the Head of the relevant Virtual School for advice as soon as possible.

There are currently two types of exclusions from school:

- Fixed term exclusions
- Permanent exclusions.

Fixed term exclusions

Schools are permitted to exclude any pupil on a fixed term basis for up to 45 days in any school year. These exclusions can only happen once the parent / carer has been officially notified in writing. Where a child has a fixed term exclusion, the school should set and mark work for that pupil. If the fixed term exclusion last for more than 5 days in any one exclusion period, the school must provide an alternative venue for them to attend whilst excluded. Best practice suggests that for Looked After Children, this alternative venue should be provided from the first day of the exclusion so that the child experiences continuity in their routine. From the school's point of view this is sometimes difficult to set up.

Permanent exclusions

These really should not be a last resort and in most cases, actions can be put in place that should remove the necessity to permanently exclude a Looked After Child. Schools can permanently exclude a child / young person if they have exceeded the 45 days of fixed term exclusion or if a serious offence / breach of the discipline code has occurred. There is an appeal procedure for permanent exclusions. A leaflet is produced for carers that explains the appeals procedure, but in most cases any appeal will be handled by the Head of the Virtual School and Social Workers.

'Unofficial exclusions'

In the past Looked After pupils have been subject to unofficial exclusion where Foster Carers have been asked to keep a child at home for part of the school day without the school issuing an official exclusion. This is illegal and does not help a child to achieve in school. In these circumstances, a school must decide to formally exclude a pupil and inform the carers that this is their decision. Foster Carers are advised that they should not voluntarily remove a child from school at the request of the school. If a school makes a request that a Looked After Child misses' school this must be accompanied with a formal written exclusion letter. If you have any concerns about unofficial exclusions of a child that you look after, then please contact the Head of the Virtual School.

Personal Education Plans

Legally any Looked After child or young person who is in education must have a Personal Education Plan that is reviewed at regular intervals. It is a statutory document for Children's Services and for the school that the child attends. All children / young people over the age of 3 attending an Early Years setting, school college or alternative education provider and children aged 2 with SEN who attend a Special School should have a PEP. This continues until the age of 19 if a young person is in full time education.

A PEP should be completed within 20 days of the child / young person coming into care or starting a new school or changing placement. The completion of the initial PEP should involve the school, the child / young person (age and ability allowing), the carer, Social Worker, and parent (on the advice of the Social Worker) wherever possible and any other professionals as appropriate.

The purpose of the PEP is to:

- Motivate the child / young person to take an active interest in their education.
- Identify specific strengths and weaknesses that need to be cultivated or need addressing. The weakness might well be due to gaps in the child's schooling rather than SEN and therefore will need special strategies to allow the child to catch up with their peers.
- To identify an action plan that allows the young person to achieve the best results from school that they can.
- To focus on the child's aspirations in respect of additional activities and opportunities or future education, training and employment
- To enable the Local Authority to plan to provide additional resources if needed to support the child's education and aspirations as a good parent would.

The initial PEP needs to be reviewed within 3 months and then the plan is reviewed at 6 monthly intervals. However, a review can be called at any time if there is an indication that things have changed. The PEP and its review forms part of the legal childcare review process and should be timed to inform these important meetings. If a child has a Statement of SEN, then one of the PEP review meetings should be timed to coincide with the SEN annual review.

In most cases, the PEP will reflect the targets and plans that the school sets for all its pupils, or those on the IEP, but will provide an opportunity to specifically discuss the individual circumstances that might make achieving successful outcomes to meet the school targets more difficult.

The complete PEPs and review documents are shared with the school, carers, Social Worker, parents and young people themselves.

Further guidance on the completion of PEPs is included in annual training delivered by the virtual school.

Local Authority support for looked after children

It is the prime responsibility of schools to meet the educational needs of all children and young people. However, as part of its Corporate Parenting responsibility the Local Authority recognises that Looked After Children have needs which require additional attention, because of their life experiences and circumstances.

There are several specialist professionals that support the educational needs of children in care. You can find the contact details for the Virtual School in Central Bedfordshire here:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/school/virtual-school/head-teacher.aspx>

Foster Carers can obtain formal or informal advice, help and guidance about the education of Looked after Children from the Virtual Head in the Authority responsible for the child that they care for.

Emergency situations

Emergency Duty Team

The Emergency Duty Team is a countywide out of hours service, responding to social care emergencies in both adult and children's services. Examples of emergencies that require a call to EDT would be if a young person has been reported missing to the police, has been admitted to hospital or has been involved in an accident. The team operates when the offices are closed, that is, between 5.20pm to 8:45am Monday to Thursday, and from 4:20 throughout weekends and bank holidays.

If you need to contact the team you should call 0300 300 8123, leave a message and a Social Worker will return your call as soon as possible. Foster Carers are reminded that your call may not be returned for some length of time, depending how busy the team is.

Fostering out of hours support

This is a telephone service for Foster Carers and adopters to speak to a Social Worker from the Fostering Team if they need advice during the hours the office is closed. Fostering staff take part on a rota system so there is always someone to speak to between 5:20pm – 11pm on Monday to Thursday, 4:20pm – 11pm on Fridays and 8:45am – 11pm Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. After these hours, you will need to contact the EDT (see above).

The out of Hours number is 0300 300 6292. If you hear the voicemail, leave a message and a worker will call you back within 20 minutes. This is a telephone service only; if a visit is needed then the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) may need to be contacted.

Medical emergencies

If the child or young person you are looking after requires medical attention in an emergency, you need to know what to do. As with any medical emergency an ambulance should be called as appropriate. Advice can be sought from the GP out of hours service or NHS 111 for less urgent situations.

Once you are assured the child or young person is being attended to, you should notify their Social Worker. If they are unavailable, you should speak to the Social Worker's manager or the Duty Worker. Outside office hours you should contact the Emergency Duty Team. These workers are responsible for organising any necessary consent and notifying parents. Foster Carers are not legally able to give consent and should not do so.

If the child or young person requires surgery or emergency medical treatment consent needs to be sought either:

- From the parents if the child or young person is accommodated
- From a representative of Children's Services if the child or young person is on a care order
- If the young person is 16 years or over, they can give their own consent depending on the child's level of understanding.

Whatever the legal status of the child or young person, parents should be kept informed by either you, out of hours Social Worker or EDT. If you are advised by medical staff that the child or young person's condition requires urgent medical treatment that cannot wait for formal consent it may be necessary to proceed without it.

Whilst you need to keep everyone informed, this should not be at the expense of being with the child or young person at a time when they may need you most.

Children or young people missing

If a child or young person placed with you does not return home when expected, you should notify the Out of Hours Service for advice. The Social Worker may contact the Emergency Duty Team and ask that you contact the Police if they believe there is a reason to do so.

A decision about contacting the police will be made if:

- The child or young person's whereabouts are unknown.
- The reason for absence is unknown.
- There is cause for concern for the child or young person because of their vulnerability.

If the police are contacted, they may need to search your home and grounds. You should be aware of this, if other children are in the home you will need to inform the police of this so that it is done in a sensitive manner.

The police may ask for additional information about the child like the name and addresses of friends and description of missing child.

Parents seeking to remove children

Most children and young people in foster care are being looked after according to a plan that has been agreed by parents. In rare situations parents may try to remove the child or young person from your care or may not return them following contact.

In these situations, you should contact the child's Social Worker or the Duty Worker in that team. If this happens outside of working hours, you will need to contact the Out of Hours Service who will advise on the best course of action. This may be to contact the Emergency Duty Team and/or the Police.

Employment and part time jobs

If a young person works part time or has a summer job this does not affect their allowances. However, if they have left school and are in full-time employment then, depending on the amount earned, they may be expected to contribute towards their rent and may not be entitled to personal allowances. For further information about this you should talk with your Fostering Social Worker.

Pets

Pets are an important part of many families' lives, and they can bring great pleasure to children and young people. Getting to know and learning how to care for a pet can be a very important experience for any child or young person. However not all children and young people have experience of or are comfortable with animals, so they may need help to learn how to behave appropriately. If you do own a pet, you will need to think about how to manage the situation carefully and set down clear guidelines to ensure the safety of both your foster child or young person and your pet. All pets will need a pet assessment.

Finance

To fairly remunerate Foster Carers who care for Central Bedfordshire young people we have a fee scheme in place for Foster Carers. Many other local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies have a fee scheme for Foster Carers. This is a competitive market and although fees are not the primary reason people choose to foster, we recognise that it is a relevant factor in attracting more carers to join Central Bedfordshire in providing foster placements.

Recruitment and retention of Foster Carers is a vital part of our strategy for the future and the biggest challenge for Local Authority Fostering services is to recruit sufficient number and variety of Foster Carers to meet the needs of Looked After Children. We have an additional responsibility to meet the challenges of the government's *Sufficiency* agenda which emphasises the need to match and place within local resources.

The current tier schemes are included within the financial guidance sent out annually to foster carers.

Expenses - Portal

Foster carers can submit expenses easily through our Portal. You will need to create an account which will enable you to submit and keep track of expenses.

Dinner money

Children's' school dinner money or the cost of packed lunch should be paid from the fostering allowance. Children and young people placed with Foster Carers are not eligible for free school meals.

Please check with the child's Social Worker whether a child is receiving free school meals when placed with you; you should inform the school that the child is no longer eligible.

Pocket money

Please see the financial guidance which is reviewed annually.

Forms

Forms in relation to children and young people looked after.

The Looked After Children paperwork provides a single comprehensive system of recording information and planning for looked after children and young people. These forms help to ensure that all the people involved with the child or young person have shared information. The children looked after paperwork is particularly important to carers as it contains crucial information to help you look after the child or young person appropriately. The child or young person's Social Worker is responsible for completing this paperwork.

Paperwork you should receive at the start of a placement.

The placement plan contains basic information about the child or young person and their family and all immediate practical arrangements for the child or young person's care, including contact arrangements. This form is vital to you as a carer because it includes:

- The formal agreement by the parent for the child or young person to be looked after (if applicable)
- The medical consent signed by parents or the social worker if there is a care order in place.
- Delegated authority tool completed.

Within the next two weeks

Care plan

A care plan is completed by the Child Care Social Worker and sets out the overall plan for the child or young person whilst they are being looked after by the Council. You should receive a copy of the care plan as soon as it is drawn up.

If you do not receive the necessary paperwork as required, you should talk to the child's Social Worker about when you will receive it. Sometimes Social Workers forget how important it is for you to have all the information required and so you may need your Fostering Social Worker's support to chase this up on behalf of you and the child or young person placed with you.

Medicals

A child or young person should have a medical before they are placed or as soon after as possible. This is usually arranged by the Social Worker but there may be circumstances when it is more appropriate for the carer to do it. In this case the Social Worker will provide you with the appropriate form to take to the doctor, to be completed at the medical.

The Council is required to ensure all looked after children and young people have a medical annually. Arrangements for this are made, according to the situation, between the carer, parent and child's Social Worker. If you are going to take the child or young person for their check-up you need the appropriate form from the Social Worker.

Childcare review consultation papers

Under the 1989 Children Act all arrangements and plans for looked after children and young people must be reviewed regularly.

Before the review is held, consultation papers are sent to the parents, the child or young person, the carer, the carer's Supervising Social Worker, the GP, the school and anyone else involved. The consultation paper is a form that asks a number of questions about the child or young person's progress in the placement, checking matters about health, education and identity. It gives you the opportunity to ensure that your comments and views are represented. If you have any difficulty completing the consultation paper you should talk to your Supervising Social Worker, who will be able to help you.

The consultation paper should be returned to the Review Manager before the review takes place. If this hasn't been possible it can still be completed and given to the Review Manager on the day of the review.

Forms in relation to approved Foster Carers

Foster Carer review forms

Under the Fostering Services Regulations Foster Carers approval must be reviewed annually. In preparation for the review the following forms need to be completed/updated:

- Safer Caring Policy
- Health and Safety Assessment
- The Annual Review Report
- IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) Report
- Fostering Social Worker's Report
- Child Care Social Worker's Report
- Carer's Report
- Foster child's feedback
- Child of Foster Carer Report (if appropriate)
- Parent of Child who is Fostered (if appropriate).

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

(DBS) checks need to be updated every three years for anyone over 18 years in the household, so you may have to complete this form in preparation for your annual review.

Medical Updates

It is our policy to seek an updated medical reference from your GP every 3 years.

Foster Carer agreement

The Foster Carer agreement is very important because it represents the contract between you, as an approved Foster Carer, and Central Bedfordshire Council. You receive this along with confirmation of your fostering approval. The agreement gives details of your approval and includes a declaration that you have read and agree to adhere to the terms and conditions within the agreement. We ask you to sign and return this declaration.

Foster Carer reviews

Your annual review is an opportunity to look back on all that you have done over the year and to look forward to your needs and development for the next year. In order to do this adequately we gather information from you, your children (if they are of an age or wish to contribute), the young person in placement (if age appropriate), the child/children's or young person's parent, your Supervising Social Worker and the Social Worker who holds case responsibility for the child/children or young person in placement. It is important that the form you will be asked to complete contains as much detail as possible about your experience of fostering in order that we are able to respond to your needs and acknowledge your strengths.

Foster Carer reviews are undertaken in the carer's home or on TEAMS if agreed in advanced with the Supervising Social Worker and the Independent Foster Carers Review Officer. Consultation documents are completed prior to the review. Your first review is presented to the Foster Panel as are any subsequent reviews where there are changes to your registration such as change in the number of children you wish to care for or the ages of the children you feel would best fit in with your family. Other reasons for your review to be presented to panel include any allegations made or a significant change in your family circumstances. All other reviews after the first year are presented to the Head of Service.

Following the review, you will receive a letter that confirms your approval and the terms of your approval.

Health

Health is not just about the absence or presence of disease or illness. It is about the overall physical, emotional, mental and sexual well-being of a child or young person. This means that looking after a child or young person's health is concerned with both:

- Managing and preventing illness, disease, and injury; and
- Promoting health and development.

Often the reason children and young people need to be looked after is that their health and development have been neglected in some way, so they have high health needs which need to be addressed. Unfortunately changes and moves often mean that looked after children and young people's health care can get disrupted. As Foster Carers, it is important that you are aware of the significance of the health needs of the children and young people you care for, from ensuring they have received their immunisations to overseeing and promoting their general health and well-being.

It is not, however, expected that you should be a health expert but that you should feel able to ask for help or advice if you are in any doubt about a child or young person's health needs.

Checklist of information you need before a child or young person is placed

When you are asked to look after a child or young person it is important that you are given sufficient information to do that safely. The following list suggests some questions you might ask:

- Who is the GP?
- Are immunisations, developmental checks up to date?
- Does the child or young person have any existing illnesses?
- Does the child or young person have any existing medical conditions?
- Is there a medical specialist involved?
- Are there any medical appointments to be attended?
- Is the child or young person taking any medication?
- Does the child or young person have any allergies?
- Are there any specific dietary requirements?

Other things to remember.

- When a child or young person is placed with you that has newly entered care, they should have an 'initial Health assessment' as soon after as can be arranged. Review health assessments take place annually.
- When a child or young person is placed with you, you should receive the placement plan part one, which includes the medical consent signed by the child or young person's parents.
- When you begin to care for a child or young person you should have their health record, which maybe the 'red book', if the parent is prepared to pass this on. If you don't have the red book, you should still have the information from it, so that you can maintain the child's health needs. You should talk to the health visitor about starting another red book, and this should go with the child when they move on. As well as providing a detailed health record, the red book also contains some useful information about childhood illnesses.
- It is important that you carefully record any illnesses or accidents the child or young person has while they are in your care. This is important not only for future health care but also for the child or young person's life-story book. Important and ordinary information such as when a child had chicken pox is information that children should have; a photograph of the child with all their spots can for some children provide a memory of being ill then being cared for and so getting better.
- All significant illnesses or accidents should be recorded in your logs and reported to your Social Worker.

Health and safety regulations

Under the Care Standards Act (2000) it is the responsibility of the fostering service to ensure adequate health and safety precautions are taken in relation to Foster Carers. This means that Foster Carers have to be registered with a fostering service and go through rigorous assessments to ensure their suitability to foster

children. They must also be adequately trained and be actively engaged in monitoring, support, and supervision to enable the reduction of risk to health and safety from every angle.

As a Foster Carer, you will undergo regular reviews of your practice and circumstances to ensure that the health and safety of carers and children is not compromised in any way. This includes using such forms as the "Health and Safety Assessment", "Dog Assessment" and the "Safer Caring" form. As a Foster Carer, who is deemed to be self-employed (for tax purposes), it is your responsibility to ensure that "good management" and "common sense" are used to look at what the risks are and take sensible measures to tackle them. It is also your responsibility to adequately record and report accidents and/or health concerns, so that the fostering service can be active in monitoring and resolving them.

Health care services

GP: Every looked after child or young person must be registered with a GP. Sometimes it is appropriate for them to remain registered with their family doctor, while in other situations it is better to register them with your doctor as a temporary patient. This is a matter for discussion with the Child Care Social Worker but needs to be determined at the start of the placement. Arrangements may change as the placement continues.

Medicals: Medicals or health assessments are undertaken by the GP. Children and young people who are looked after should have a medical when they are first placed and annually thereafter. The parents provide consent to this, in the placement plan part one. Young people over the age of 16 years can give their own consent. Some young people may be unwilling to undergo medicals, and this needs to be discussed with the Child Care Social Worker.

Dentist: Looked after children and young people need to have regular dental checks. If the child is already registered with a dentist, it may be best for them to remain with that dentist. **NB:** It is helpful to make a note of the date the child visited the dentist and any treatment they received, both for the Child Care review and as standard information you should keep on behalf of the child. Many looked after children and young people may not be used to visiting the dentist regularly and they may therefore need remedial treatment. They may also need help to encourage their dental hygiene.

Health visitor: The health visitor has responsibility for the health care of all children from 0 to five years and is based at the GP practice. They are a useful source of information and advice about caring for babies and young children and about child development. If you have concerns about the health or development of the child you are caring for you can talk to your health visitor, who will either be able to offer advice or refer you on to other health professionals.

The health visitor is usually the person who gives immunisation and undertakes regular developmental checks.

Immunisations: The national immunisation programme has meant that many dangerous diseases such as polio, diphtheria and tetanus have nearly disappeared in this country. Immunisation prepares our bodies to fight against diseases in case we encounter them in the future. The vaccines work by stimulating the immune system to produce antibodies against the disease.

Many looked after children and young people do not have up-to-date records of the immunisations they have received and have therefore perhaps missed this vital protection. It is important you have information about a child or young person's immunisation record so that children can receive missed vaccinations as appropriate.

Consents for immunisations are provided by parents in the looked after children paperwork so the Child Care Social Worker can sign the necessary medical forms.

You should discuss consent with the child's Social Worker if the child requires additional immunisations for example, for hepatitis. The following sets out the immunisation programme:

2 months	Polio (by mouth),
1st primary injection (Hib, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough)	Meningitis C injection
3 months	Polio (by mouth)
2nd primary injection (Hib, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough)	Meningitis C injection
4 months	Polio (by mouth)
3rd Primary Injection (Hib, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough)	Meningitis C injection
12 -15 months	MMR injection (mumps, measles and rubella)

3 - 5 years	MMR injection
Pre-school injection (diphtheria, tetanus)	Polio (by mouth)
10 – 14 years: BCG (against tuberculosis – skin test and then injection if required)	
13 – 18 years	School leavers booster (diphtheria, tetanus)
Polio (by mouth)	
Cervical cancer injection (girls)	

The school nurse usually gives these two vaccinations at school.

Carers must not sign consents for any routine medical treatments – these should be done by the child or young person’s parent or Social Worker depending on their legal status.

Developmental checks: These are provided for all babies and pre-school children.

They are intended to spot developmental delays and/or health problems as early as possible so that appropriate treatment can be prescribed promptly to minimise the effects of any difficulties. These developmental checks are completed at the following ages:

- 6 – 8 weeks
- 6 – 9 months
- 18 – 24 months
- 36 – 48 months.

It is important that babies and children have these developmental checks to ensure that they are reaching developmental milestones.

Optician

Looked after children and young people should visit the optician annually, to check their vision and examine the health of their eyes. N.B. Keep a note of the date the child or young person visited the optician for the Child Care review and as standard information you should keep on behalf of the child or young person.

School health services

School health services take responsibility for the health care of all children from the health visitor through the school years. Each school has an allocated school nurse who undertakes medicals and immunisations. If you have any concerns about the health or development of a child or young person placed with you, you can discuss these with the school nurse who can offer advice or refer you on to other health professionals.

Hospitals - in patient

If a child or young person you are looking after must stay in hospital this can be a very frightening and worrying experience. The fear and worry can be considerably reduced if the parent or carer is available to offer care and reassurance. The circumstances of the admission will obviously determine what part you can play in reassuring the child or young person. If it is an emergency admission it may not be possible for you to stay with the child or young person. However, you should plan to stay until they are settled, and the immediate crisis has passed. However, for planned admissions, hospitals can decide for parents or the carer to stay with children in hospital. If the child needs and wants you to stay with them and you are able and willing to do this you should talk to your Supervising Social Worker about any practical difficulties this might present, for example, looking after other children or transport. N.B. You should record any hospital admissions the child has and the treatment they receive in the Foster Carer’s logbook.

Blood borne viruses.

Whilst HIV is perhaps the most talked about of the blood-borne viruses it is not the most contracted in this country. The following provides information about them all. The main blood-borne viruses of concern are:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), affecting the immune system of the body.
- Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), which cause Hepatitis, a disease of the liver.

HIV is not spread by normal daily contact and activities for example, coughing, sneezing, kissing, hugging, holding hands, sharing bathrooms and toilets or food, cups, cutlery and crockery.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a virus, which causes infection that can damage the liver. Most adults infected with the virus recover fully and develop lifelong immunity. However, a small proportion (1 in 10) remain infected and become hepatitis B carriers. Hepatitis B infection is preventable by immunisation.

The UK has a relatively low prevalence of hepatitis B (about 0.3% are carriers). Hepatitis B is more common in other parts of the world such as South-East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, the Middle and Far East and Africa.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B infection is spread by direct contact with an infected person's blood or certain body fluids. The main routes of infection are like HIV.

Hepatitis C

Like Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C is a virus, which causes infection that may damage the liver. Many people with Hepatitis C have no symptoms and are often unaware that they have been infected. Some will experience tiredness, nausea, abdominal pain and flu-like symptoms. They also develop jaundice, but this is unusual.

About one in five people with Hepatitis C recover. Many people who get Hepatitis C become chronically infected (Hepatitis C carriers). About one in five people with chronic infection develop scarring of the liver (Cirrhosis) after 20 to 30 years. Most patients who develop Hepatitis C are likely to live out a normal life span.

The UK has a relatively low prevalence of hepatitis C, about 0.5% of the general population. However, studies have shown that the prevalence among injecting drug users in the UK may be as high as 30 to 80%.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Currently, the main way in which hepatitis C infection is passed on in the UK is through the sharing of contaminated equipment by drug users. Hepatitis C is not spread by normal daily contact.

Are other body fluids infectious?

Urine, faeces, saliva, sputum, tears, sweat and vomit are not considered to pose a risk of HIV, Hepatitis B or C infection unless they are contaminated with blood.

Preventing the spread of blood-borne viruses

Children and young people looked after need information and advice on preventing blood-borne virus transmission. This includes emphasising the particular risk of HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C through injecting drug misuse, involvement in prostitution and involvement in unprotected sexual intercourse with frequent partner change.

Infection control procedures need to be always adopted both to reduce the risk of spreading a blood-borne virus where the existence of a virus is known and because children or young people may be carrying a virus that has not been detected.

There are standard precautions that are recommended as safe practice for all Council staff, and for all those who care for children whether in their own homes, private homes, or in residential settings. These are common sense precautions that will protect against blood-borne viruses and other infections.

These recommended precautions include advice about standard infection control precautions such as spillages of blood or body fluids, crockery and cutlery, linen and disposal of waste. Further details are available from the fostering service on request.

Hospitals – outpatient: The child or young person you are looking after may have appointments with specialists at outpatient clinics. It is important that these appointments are kept and if you are unable to take the child you should discuss this with the Child Care Social Worker so that they can make alternative arrangements. N.B. You should record these appointments and their outcomes carefully for future reference.

Child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS)

This service helps children and young people (and their families) who have a wide range of mental health difficulties. Sometimes the children and young people you look after may be particularly vulnerable because of their previous experiences coupled with the disturbance caused by being looked after. If you are concerned about a child or young person you should discuss this with the Child Care Social Worker or your Supervising Social Worker to see whether a referral to CAMHS would be appropriate.

Sleep

Whilst no two children need the same amount of sleep, regular sleep is essential for healthy growth and development. For some of the children and young people you look after, going to bed may not be straightforward. They may never have had a regular bedtime. Bedtime may remind them of unhappy or frightening events or experiences. Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to these things and find out as much as you can about bedtime routines, whether they have a favourite toy or blanket etc.

Developing a bedtime routine is important and will generally be successful if it becomes the natural conclusion to a day that has included enough play and activity, fun, exercise, and food.

Some children and young people under stress may not sleep well. Some may have nightmares or night terrors when they are first placed with you. If, however, they persist you should tell your Supervising Social Worker and/or child's Social Worker, as they may indicate a more serious disturbance.

Diet

The connection between diet and health is now well known and it is a crucial part of caring for any child or young person. For many of the children and young people you look after there may be a range of difficulties around food. They may only have a taste for burger and chips, they may have been neglected and hungry, leading them to have an apparent hole that can't be filled. So, it is important to understand the child and young person's needs, both emotionally and physically to make food pleasurable and help the child develop a healthy diet.

A balanced diet including plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables should be provided, whilst less healthy foods, like crisps and sweets should be reduced. Whilst some children and young people may appreciate this, others may accept it only gradually.

Exercise

It is now well recognised that regular exercise is essential for healthy growth and development. Our changing lifestyles have meant that children and young people may not get exercise by, for example, walking to and from school. It may therefore be important to think about other ways to encourage the children or young person placed with you to get sufficient exercise.

Personal hygiene

This is a developmental matter that is closely related to the way a child or young person has been cared for. The personal hygiene of a baby or young child is the total responsibility of their parent or carer. As the child grows, they gradually will take responsibility for looking after themselves. Some of the children or young people you look after may not have been taught how to take care of themselves and will need help and guidance to catch up. It is important not

to assume that a child or young person will know about personal hygiene based on the age they are, it is better to check this out for yourself. Dentists advise that children need help to brush their teeth properly until they are about seven years old.

For some teenagers, personal hygiene becomes an issue when they may be asserting their independence and resisting your direction to shower etc. This is usually a passing phase, but unremitting poor personal hygiene may indicate that the young person has a low regard for him or herself. It is sometimes helpful to encourage the young person to choose hair and body products of their own.

Health care for black and other ethnic minority children and young people

Dietary needs of black and other ethnic minority children and young people: Providing a black and other ethnic minority child in your care with food that is familiar to them, both in the way it looks and tastes, is important to help them feel comfortable and maintain links with their cultural background.

Some cultures are strict about the food they eat as well as how it is handled and prepared and where indicated this must be adhered to. It is important that carers understand the cultural and religious beliefs behind many of the diets of black and ethnic minority children and young people.

Some considerations when providing food for black and ethnic minority children and young people:

- Ask the birth family or Social Worker for information on the dietary needs and preferences of the child or young person.
- Check if the child or young person has any religious and cultural dietary restrictions; find out if they have any favourite foods; do not make assumptions; try involving other members of the household when planning meals.
- Introduce the different dishes to other members of the household to try so the child or young person does not feel isolated at mealtimes.

If you need diet advice and information for black and other ethnic minority children and young people you should talk to your Supervising Social Worker, who should be able access appropriate resources.

There are some medical conditions that are more common against black and ethnic minority people. These are:

Sickle cell disorder: This primarily affects people from the African Caribbean community but may occur in those of Indian and Pakistani heritage. Sickle cell anaemia is not an infection, it is inherited because of a child receiving sickle haemoglobin from both parents. These parents are usually healthy, silent carriers of the sickle cell trait or they may also suffer from sickle cell anaemia.

The symptoms very rarely start until the age of six months, and these could include painful swelling of the hands and feet, infection, and anaemia. The classic swollen hands and feet in a child with sickle cell anaemia are sometimes mistaken for child abuse. This misdiagnosis obviously causes considerable unnecessary stress, anger and embarrassment to the parents or carers. The illness may also cause episodes of pain in the joints, abdomen, and any other parts of the body. Those affected with sickle cell anaemia are more susceptible to infection and in some cases, there is the increased risk of meningitis. In addition, the child's growth may be delayed. Symptoms and their effects can vary from one individual to another. There is no cure for sickle cell anaemia but there are various forms of treatment that can either prevent or relieve the symptoms.

Anyone working with black children or young people affected by sickle cell can get more information about the disorder from the sickle cell society.

Thalassaemia: This primarily affects people from around the Mediterranean region and is also a chronic hereditary condition of the blood. Symptoms of thalassaemia do not become apparent until between the age of three and eighteen months. Children then become pale, do not sleep well, do not want to eat, and may vomit their feeds. If children are not diagnosed and treated the condition can be fatal. Treatment includes regular blood transfusions, and this proves successful for most children who go on to lead normal lives with continued treatment.

Within Bedfordshire we have a policy that children and young people from susceptible ethnic groups should be tested for sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia this is done by means of a blood test. If you are caring for a black and ethnic minority child or young person you should discuss the need for them to be tested with their Social Worker.

Mongolian blue spots: These are discolorations seen on children of Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Mediterranean descent. They are often mistaken for child abuse as the discolorations look like bruising. They are commonly found over the scrotum or lower lumbar spine, although they may be situated elsewhere. They usually fade, as the child grows older.

Bruising: A bruise on dark skin may not be as easy to recognise by someone who is not used to looking after a black or other ethnic minority child or young person. It is therefore important to learn how to identify bruising on darker skin. If in doubt, seek advice from a doctor or health visitor about what you should be looking for.

Holidays

Holidays are an important part of family life, providing an opportunity for everyone to spend time together away from all day-to-day demands. They are planned and anticipated family events that have considerable significance and often the build-up of expectation increases the feelings of disappointment if things go wrong.

Holidays with the child or young person placed with you

Except in very exceptional circumstances, long term Foster Carers would be expected to take their fostered children on holiday with them. You should give the child or young person's Social Worker details of where you are going and how long you will be away as far in advance as possible.

Whilst many short-term Foster Carers do take the children and young people placed with them on holiday, carers need to be aware that this may be less straightforward. Holidays can interrupt contact arrangements, parents may be unwilling to consent, and legal considerations may make holidays abroad impossible. This means it is important to discuss holiday plans with the child or young person's Social Worker as far in advance as possible.

The legal status of the child/ young person can influence whether it is possible for a child/ young person to leave the country. There may also be other reasons why a holiday abroad might not be in the best interest of the young person.

If it is possible for the young person to leave the country, obtaining a passport can be a lengthy process, as is obtaining the permissions and agreements required by the law.

Therefore, please make sure that you inform the child's Social Worker in plenty of time to avoid any disappointment.

Children's Services will pay the cost of the child's/young person's passport. A letter of delegated consent will also be needed when taking a foster child outside of the UK. Do not be put off by this list of apparent difficulties. Many carers and the children placed with them have wonderful foreign holidays, but, like most holidays, make sure you make your arrangements in plenty of time.

Children must not be taken out of school in term time for holidays. Permission will not usually be given for Foster Carers to take children out of school in term time for holidays.

Accommodation while you are away.

Foster Carers should consider the accommodation and sleeping arrangements on the holiday in the same way as responsible parents would do for any family holiday. Children do not necessarily need to have their own room, (unless there are clear reasons why it would not be appropriate for them to share) but Foster Carers should ensure that arrangements will enable safe care for the group and will allow appropriate supervision in what is likely to be an unfamiliar environment. Foster Carers are advised to discuss any concerns or queries with the fostering team.

Holidays without the child or young person placed with you.

Many short-term foster families have a succession of placements through the year and for them it may be important to have a holiday without any fostered children or young people.

This may be an important time for fostering families to recharge their batteries. Though it is possible to arrange respite care for fostered children and young people placed with you, it is obviously preferable if you can take your holidays between placements.

Holiday Allowance

When a carer is planning a holiday away and taking the child with them, they can claim 1 week or 2 weeks holiday allowance (these rates are equivalent to 1 weeks or 2 weeks fostering allowance and are age related). The 2 weeks holiday allowance can be claimed for 1 or 2 weeks at a time, when requested. Foster carers can claim up to 2 week's holiday allowance to cover the cost of activities during the school holidays if they are not going away, however carers may be asked what additional activities the holiday allowance is being used for. Holidays for school age children must not be taken in term time

Independence

One of the objectives of looking after young people aged 13+ is to promote their well-being and to help them gain independence. This will include help with budgeting, cooking and a range of other skills needed to become an independent person.

Carers are expected to provide advice and support in a warm and caring environment. With the agreement of their Social Worker and considering the young person's capacity to undertake tasks, they should be allowed and encouraged to use household equipment, for example for cooking, laundry and cleaning. They should also be given some responsibility for managing their personal allowance and clothing money.

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

If you are unhappy about a decision made by the Fostering panel such as not to approve you as a Foster Carer or your approval has been withdrawn, you have the right to appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism. More information about the independent review mechanism can be found here:

[Independent Review Mechanism - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Independent visitors

Under the Children Act 1989 the Council is required to decide for looked after children and young people, who have little or no family contact, to have an Independent Visitor.

The decision about whether an Independent Visitor should be appointed is usually taken at the CLA review. The Social Worker will then make a referral for an independent visitor to be identified.

The role of the independent visitor is to visit, advise and befriend a child or young person, providing them with someone independent of the children and family services department. The Independent Visitor can attend the childcare review if the child or young person chooses, to support them and put forward their views.

More information about independent visitors and advocates is available here: [Advocacy and Independent Visitors \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

Insurance

Household insurance

You should inform your insurance company that you are fostering or intending to foster. You should seek written confirmation from them that for the purposes of the insurance policy, any children, or young people you are

fostering are regarded as members of your family whilst they are placed with you. It is advisable to confirm this when you renew your policy annually.

Central Bedfordshire Council will consider any claims that are not covered by your policy. You should talk to your Supervising Social Worker about this if required.

Car insurance

Carers are responsible for maintaining their vehicles in a roadworthy condition and to meet legal requirements with regards to MOT, tax, insurance, and licenses.

It is advised that you have fully comprehensive motor insurance and inform your insurers you are a Foster Carer. If you claim mileage from the department for journeys you make on its behalf, you should inform your insurance company that you need business use insurance.

Supervising Social Workers will need to see all your insurance documents as part of your annual health and safety check.

Leaving care

On 1st October 2001, the Leaving Care Act came into place and was designed to give care leavers aged 16 and 17-year-old the support that they need to prepare for independence and to live independently. There are certain rights to housing, more help with education and training. What each young person receives is dependent on how long they have been in care and their age.

When a young person looked after reaches the age of 15 1/2 years, they should be allocated a Personal Adviser. At this stage, the Personal Adviser will complete a needs assessment which provides an overview of the young person's circumstances and needs for the future.

By the time the young person reaches 16 years and 3 months of age their Personal Adviser should have completed their pathway plan with the young person. The pathway plan covers areas such as employment/college, accommodation, health, and leisure, emotional, self-care. The aim of the plan is to help the young person to make the most of their life as they make their journey into adulthood. The Leaving Care Worker will advise, support and guide the young person through this transition.

Entitlements

There are different types of eligibility dependent on age, how long the young person was in care and at what age, when they left care and if they are still in care. The Leaving Care Worker will advise regarding eligibility.

For any young person aged between 16 and 21 children's services have a responsibility to give advice and support in dealing with a range of things when leaving care.

more information is available here: [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000 - Explanatory Notes \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/31/section/1)

The local offer for care leavers in Central Bedfordshire is available here: [Local Offer for care leavers | Central Bedfordshire Council](#)

Staying put

The intention of the staying put arrangement is to ensure young people can remain with their former Foster Carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition as do their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing or tenancy breakdown. For more information, please read the staying put policy available here: [Staying Put \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com) Local Safeguarding Children Board

The Local Safeguarding Children Board is an inter-agency forum for coordinating the work done by the various agencies to safeguard children and promote their welfare and ensuring that this work is carried out effectively.

The Strategic Board meets quarterly, and the Operations Board meets 6 times a year both are chaired by an Independent Chair.

The work of the LSCB is divided between the following sub-groups who meet either monthly or bimonthly. For further information visit www.bedfordshirelscb.org.uk.

Lodgers

This refers to both children and adults who may come to live in your house for short or long periods of time but were not featured in your original fostering assessment. This may be a relative or paying guest, both affect the terms of the foster care agreement you signed when you were approved as a Foster Carer.

Relatives

If you are planning to have relatives staying with you for extended periods you should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker as adults over 18 years in contact with children and young people need to be subject to a DBS disclosure. DBS disclosures take time to process so these ideally need to be completed in advance of the relatives/friends coming {please advise your Supervising Social Worker as soon as you are aware that a relative or friend will be staying with you for an extended period. Additionally, visitors may affect practical matters including sleeping arrangements etc.

Students from abroad

School age children from abroad (under 18 years)

Carers should inform their Supervising Social Worker in advance that they intend to have a student to stay and how long they will be staying. Your Supervising Social Worker will then undertake an assessment to consider the impact on any looked after children or young people in placement, which will include:

- Accommodation issues: the student should not share a bedroom with a looked after child or young person.
- Emotional and behavioural issues: how the looked after child or young person would manage the arrival of a new person.
- The student must not be left in sole care of any looked after child or young person.
- The organisation arranging the placement of students from abroad should be checked.
- Adult students from abroad (18 years +)
- All the above requirements apply in addition to the following: All reasonable attempts need to be made to obtain DBS checks for the visitor.

The Supervising Social Worker should contact the organisation responsible for arranging the accommodation with the carer to confirm what checks or information they have about the individual and confirm that all appropriate immigration procedures have been followed.

The Supervising Social Worker should interview the student to:

- Assess their understanding of fostering.
- Discuss safe caring issues.
- Obtain basic information about the person.
- All appropriate information needs to be discussed with Fostering Team Manager and may need to be presented to Fostering Panel
- A risk assessment form may need to be completed.

It is important that as a Foster Carer you discuss with your Supervising Social Worker any changes in your household so that we can be sure that children and young people in placement are appropriately considered and protected.

What should the child or young person call you?

This will be determined by the age of the child or young person, what the plans are and by what is comfortable for everyone. The child or young person may have preferences about what they should be called and so it is important to check this out rather than making assumptions. Unless the child is adopted you should always uphold the title of mother and father for their birth parents.

The fostered child or young person:

When children or young people need to be looked after, they are required to leave much of what is familiar to them and adjust to a whole range of new people and situations. It is hard to think of your household as strange but that is exactly what it is to a newcomer. So, the early days of a placement are extremely important in setting the scene for you, your family and the fostered child or young person.

young person may be feeling that they are in care because they are misbehaving and that they should keep still and quiet, so they are not given any further punishment. Whilst the child must be allowed to come out at his or her own pace, it is important to remember that however silently they do it, they still need your approval, interest and attention.

Indiscriminately affectionate behaviour: This is very common behaviour among children or young people who, because of early disruptions or abuse, may not have made vital one-to-one bonds with significant adults. These children or young people may have distorted perceptions about relationships, having learnt a range of inappropriate ways to relate to adults, which may then continue in the foster home. It is important that you quickly establish appropriate boundaries for the child or young person in your care if it seems they are unable to do this for themselves. This needs to be done gently so the child does not feel rejected by you but so that everyone is kept safe.

Your family: Your own family will take time to adjust too. At first, they may see the child or young person as the honoured guest, and everybody will make an extra effort to make a new member feel welcome. Later your own children may see the child or young person as an intruder, and they may feel you have deserted them because you must devote so much time to the fostered child or young person. During these early days, it is a good idea to think carefully about how much your own children should involve the fostered child or young person in their lives. Should they be encouraged to share friends, should they attend the same school, or should your child take the fostered child along to their brownie or scout meetings? All these things would at first glance appear perfectly harmless. However, it is probably better to wait until everyone is more settled before making decisions about such arrangements, rather than having to cancel them later.

Your own children will be affected by fostering, both positively and negatively. Whilst your children may be looking forward to the idea of another family member, the reality of the new arrival can sometimes be different. Your own children will probably spend a lot of time with your fostered child or young person, and most importantly sharing you. You need to be alert to possible difficulties:

- Your own children may copy undesirable behaviour, such as swearing.
- Your fostered child or young person may have seen, heard or experienced inappropriate things that they may share with your child. This could worry or upset your child if they do not have strategies to cope with it
- Children who have been abused, physically, sexually, or emotionally, sometimes replay that abuse in their relationships with others. Your own children can be vulnerable in these situations, especially if they are younger or smaller.
- Your own children may be strong and well-balanced, but a newcomer may disrupt this, so they will need plenty of reassurance from you.
- When fostered children or young people move on it can be a significant loss for your own children and they may need help managing this,
- These potential difficulties need to be considered before they cause problems that become unmanageable for everyone concerned. It is helpful to consider some strategies that will protect everyone.
- Encourage your own children to share with you anything they hear or see that worries them.
- Talk about OK and not OK secrets and give your children the words to explain why they won't always be able to keep secrets.
- Develop house rules that give everyone space and protection.

When carers are approved by the fostering panel, the panel sets out the terms of approval, that is, the number, age range and gender of the children and young people who may be placed in the carer's family.

There are times when carers are asked to take placements that fall outside the terms of their approval. This may be because of the high demand for placements or because we are trying to keep siblings together. If you are asked to consider a placement under these circumstances you, along with your Supervising Social Worker or the duty worker.

from the fostering team, need to think carefully about whether this is appropriate for you. You will have to think about sleeping arrangements, the likely duration of the placement and how it will be supported.

Children or young people moving on from your home.

Why do children or young people move on?

As with your own children, all foster children or young people will move on from you at some time. It is important to remember all moves involve loss and uncertainty, so even planned, positive moves will stir up mixed feelings.

Most foster children return to their families, usually to their parents but sometimes to grandparents or other relatives. Some will move on to a new family as part of their permanency plan. Some will move on to independence, to live on their own or with friends. Some children move to a new foster family because the placement with your family is not working. If a permanent placement is not working and needs to end, the planning for this needs to be done very carefully. All the parties involved in a permanent placement have made a considerable investment, and there will be much to untangle. Often a disruption meeting helps everyone to understand what went wrong and why.

Whatever the reason for the move, ideally all moves should be planned. The plan for the move and the reasons for it should be understood by Foster Carers, parents and children, even if everyone may not agree with the plan.

When a child or young person moves there is a great deal that can be done to make it positive and minimise the negative effects. This will include considering factors like:

- Timing – perhaps related to school terms or holidays.
- Introductions – these might be short visits for tea or overnight stays, depending on the age and understanding of the child or young person.
- Who moves the child – this could be the Child Care Social Worker or the Foster Carer depending on the situation?
- How it is explained to the child and by whom – ideally this should be done by the Child Care Social Worker in the presence of the Foster Carer so that the explanation can be repeated when the child asks more questions
- What links should be maintained between one placement and the next – this needs to be explored, particularly for children who have had many people disappear from their lives?
- There are some practical steps that can be taken to communicate an important positive message to the child as they leave your family. These might include a leaving card and/or gift, a special goodbye tea and the way their belongings are packed. Children and young people should be provided with a holdall and their personal possessions should be packed in. Black bin bags must not be used, these are for rubbish!

As the Foster Carer, you will have a very important role, but you should expect help and support from your Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker.

Planned moves.

Returning home: A number of children or young people do return home, and, in this situation, you will probably have been closely involved with the parents. A rehabilitation plan will be made, which will involve increasing family contact. During this time, the child will have mixed feelings, excitement about going home but concerns and worries about what will have changed. They will need opportunities to talk about all of this. This can be a difficult time for Foster Carers concerned whether the child or young person will be safe and happy at home. It is often helpful for all concerned if you share with parents what has happened in your home, regarding routines etc. especially with babies and young children. As the person who has cared for the child successfully you are well placed to assist parents who have previously struggled, by offering advice and suggestions.

Moving on to another short-term family: Some children or young people are unable to stay in their short-term placements and this can be for a wide variety of reasons, which may be about you, your family, the child or a combination of them all. If you do feel that a placement is not working for whatever reason you should discuss this with your Fostering Social Worker as soon as possible. There may be ways of helping that would avoid a move for the

child or young person. If a move becomes unavoidable it is vital that, as far as is possible the move is planned with care. Everyone involved will experience a loss. There may also be feelings of anger, disappointment, failure, hurt and sadness. However, it is important to understand that the damage these feelings can cause can be minimised by talking openly with the child or young person. In this you will develop an understanding together and realise both the good and bad bits of the placement.

Moving on to a permanent family: When a child in your care has been matched to a permanent family (or adoption), there will be opportunities for carers to meet, and this relationship is crucial as the child transitions from one caregiver to another.

Moving on to independence: This is a very important time for a young person and needs very careful preparation. As the Foster Carer, your role will be very important, but you can expect support and help from the young person's personal advisor and your Supervising Social Worker, who will share in the young person's pathway plan. The timing of a move will depend on the age and understanding of the young person. It will be important that the young person knows they can keep in contact and seek your help and support. The Council continues to have a duty to young people leaving care until the age of 24 years.

Unplanned moves

These are when children or young people leave placements at very short notice when there is no time to prepare. These endings can be challenging for everyone involved. You are expected to give at least 28 days' notice if you wish to end a placement unless it would be unsafe to do so.

Family time (Contact)

Family time is usually considered before a child or young person is placed, though the details are finalised between the parents, Foster Carer and Social Worker.

Occasionally the child and the parents do not have family time when the child is first placed. This can happen for a range of reasons. From the outset, effort should be made by everyone involved to see how this situation should be resolved. If the child or young person is the subject of a care order, family time arrangements may be part of the agreements made in court and therefore can only be changed in extreme situations. Often older teenagers will decide for themselves the frequency and duration of family time. You will always be informed of the names of the people with whom the young person can and cannot have family time.

If you are having any difficulties with the issues raised by family time or with any specific family time arrangements, you should discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker.

Internet:

The internet is now widely acknowledged as providing a rich source of information and entertainment. Children and young people are encouraged to access it to help with their homework. Social media can also provide ways for children and young people to be in touch with other like-minded people to share interests and problems. All this makes the internet a valuable and important element of children and young people's lives today. However, there are some safeguards that are advised to ensure children and young people's safety:

- Computers should be sited in a living room so that adults are able to check what children and young people are doing.
- Internet providers and apps can provide control systems to stop access to upsetting or inappropriate internet sites. It is important that you set up these parental controls from the outset.
- If children or young people are accessing social media, they should be warned about the dangers of giving out personal information.
- You should encourage children and young people to talk to you about their social media use. There is annual training which covers the safe use of social media.

Resource management panels

The Council holds resource management panels to consider allocation of services and resources to meet the needs of children with specialist, complex or additional needs.

The Resource Panels meet weekly and are responsible for agreeing additional services or resources for looked after children. All allocations of services are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure desired outcomes are being met.

The Joint Agency Panels (JAP) meet monthly and agrees joint or tripartite funding for accommodation or support packages for children with complex and challenging needs. Commissioners and practitioners from Children's Services (Education, Social Care, Youth) and Health form the panel.

Education Provision Panels: These multi-agency panels consider requests for placement in a specialist school or provision for young people with statements of special educational need.

Any known behaviours and positive ways to address difficult behaviours should be identified in the child's care plan and discussed at the placement planning meeting and in reviews. The child's Keep Safe Plan will address risk to the child, other children, and Foster Carers. Within the annual training programme there is always a course scheduled within the year to meet this training need.

Supervision and support visits

All Foster Carers have a named Supervising Social Worker who is the link between the Foster Carer and the department. The purpose of these visits is to help Foster Carers meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them and to encourage carers' development. Your Supervising Social Worker will complete a supervision form, which outlines the things you have discussed and what action needs to be taken and by whom. You both sign this and have a copy so that you can ensure things get done as agreed. Your Social Worker will also read your diary and logbook periodically during visits. Your Supervising Social Worker is there to help you and your family – to offer advice, information, practical solutions, a listening ear, a sounding board, and liaise with others on your behalf. They will also attend meetings with you, like childcare reviews to offer support. Help and support can also be offered over the telephone or by e-mail.

If for any reason you encounter difficulties in your relationship with your Supervising Social Worker, please contact one of the Fostering Team Managers.

Unannounced visits

Local authorities are expected to make two unannounced visits to Foster Carers' homes per year. Concerns about standards of care in a particular foster home, may warrant more frequent unannounced visits. This arises from Standard 22.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.

Your Social Worker will use the visit as an opportunity to see the child's bedroom and to look at the condition of any equipment we may have supplied. They do need to see your foster child. As with any visit, it is an opportunity for you to raise any issues you may be concerned about.

All relevant observations, discussions and agreed actions will be recorded on the 'Unannounced Visit Recording' form.

Fostering Network

Fostering Network is a national organisation for Foster Carers. It provides training, information and advice to Foster Carers and represents the interests of Foster Carers at both local and central government level.

Central Bedfordshire contracts in an independent advice and mediation service from the Fostering Network. This enables Central Bedfordshire's Foster Carers to receive independent support which is often valued if a Foster Carer has had an allegation made against them. Fostering Network details can be found here:

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice->

[information/advice/fostering-network-helplines](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-)

If you would like to access the advice and mediation service talk to your Supervising Social Worker who will arrange access for you.

Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

You can find the contact details for Ofsted here:

<https://online.ofsted.gov.uk/OnlineOfsted/public/ContactUs.aspx>

All carers are required to co-operate with inspections by Ofsted and allow any person authorised by them to visit them in their home at a convenient time if requested.

Review of approval

- The approval status of every carer is reviewed on an annual basis. It can happen more frequently, when there is a change of circumstance or a serious complaint or allegation. Reviews will be chaired by the reviewing officer who is part of the professional standards quality assurance service.

Panels

Fostering and Permanence Panel

Functions of the Fostering and Permanence Panels

Fostering and Permanence Panels meet at least once a month to:

- Consider applications for approval of Foster Carers and recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer.
- Recommend terms of approval.
- Recommend whether a person continues to be suitable to act as a Foster Carer at the first annual carer review.
- Recommend whether a person continues to be suitable to act as a Foster Carer at other times when their circumstances have changed.
- Recommend whether a person continues to be suitable to act as a Foster Carer following allegations or concerns.
- Consider whether Foster Carers are a suitable match for a particular child under the age of 13.
- Consider and recommend terminations of approval.

Who sits on the Panels?

The panel consists of an Independent Chair, Elected Members, a Social Worker with Child Care experience, and another who has expertise in fostering work and at least four independent people one of whom has been a Foster Carer. There is also a Fostering Panel Advisor and an administrator to take minutes.

How the Panels work

The Supervising Social Worker prepares the appropriate report, which is sent to panel members two weeks in advance. The Fostering Social Worker attends the panel to assist members in their deliberations. The panel then makes appropriate recommendations. The recommendations are then considered by the Decision Maker. The Decision Maker determines the outcome. Applicants are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel when their case is heard, they will be accompanied by the Fostering Social Worker who has written their Assessment or Annual Review.

Termination of approval

Your approval as a Foster Carer can be terminated in the following two circumstances:

When you decide you wish to cease fostering

If you and your family decide that you no longer wish to be approved Foster Carers, you should give the department 28 days' notice in writing. Your approval would then be formally terminated 28 days from the date of your notice. You will receive written confirmation of this, and an exit interview will be offered. The fostering panel is also informed.

When the fostering service decides

If the fostering service has reason to believe that a Foster Carer or their household are no longer suitable to be approved as Foster Carers:

- A report will be prepared for consideration by the fostering panel.

If the fostering panel considers that the approval is no longer appropriate, then the fostering service will:

- Give written notice to the Foster Carer that it proposes to terminate their approval together with the reasons for this.
- Invite the Foster Carer to submit written representations or contact the IRM within 28 days.
- If the fostering service receives no representation from the Foster Carer, then their approval is formally terminated in writing.

If the fostering service receives representations within the 28-day period, it will:

- Refer the case to the fostering panel for further consideration.

As soon as is practicable after the decision is made that approval should be terminated, the fostering service will:

- Give written notice to the Foster Carer that their approval is terminated and the reasons for the termination.
- You will be given the contact details of the Fostering Network whom you may wish to contact for support.
- You will be given details of the Independent Review Mechanism (see section I for details).

Training

All approved mainstream Foster Carers are required to complete pre-approval training, but this is only the beginning and cannot provide all you need to equip you for the fostering task. Training is linked to the Foster Carers tier payment scheme and completed training will affect which tier Foster Carers are on.

Information regarding training will be sent to all carers following approval together with a Training Passport to keep a record of completed training. Information Each Foster Carer can register to attend virtual and classroom training, check course details and apply for e-Learning. It is expected that you take responsibility for booking on to any training required as outlined in the training policy. You can discuss your learning needs with your Supervising Social Worker.

The training is an opportunity to provide you with skills required to foster care. The sessions are designed to be informal and enjoyable.

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to equal opportunity and actively promotes anti-discriminatory practice. There are specific courses designed to raise and develop your awareness of these issues and all Foster Carers will be expected to demonstrate that they have a basic level of understanding.

TSD

TSD (Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care) are a set of training, support, and development standards for Foster Carers. Their introduction and aim is to improve the lives of children, young people, their families and carers.

The Standards aim to:

- Provide consistency and quality of training for Foster Carers across England
- Provide access to the most up-to-date information, advice, and guidance for Foster Carers
- Allow opportunities for career progression and development by providing underpinning knowledge and skills.
- Improve the status of Foster Carers as trained professionals and a valued part of the children's workforce.

The Standards set out the key areas of training that Foster Carers will need before they are approved and what they need after approval.

There are seven Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

- 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.

All carers will need to complete the Standards within their first year of fostering. The second carer will only need to complete a number of elements for each standard. Your Supervising Social Worker will give you guidance as to what you need to complete. For further information click the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-foster-carers>

Level 3 Diploma for the Children & Young People's Workforce

We offer all carers the opportunity to access a Level 3 Diploma which is government funded subject to the criteria. Further information is available via Bedfordshire Employment & Skills Academy: [Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Academy Enquiry Form](#) | [Privacy Notice \(centralbedfordshire.gov.uk\)](#)