

# Changes in the Fostering Household Composition

## REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

[Regulation 28 - Reviews and terminations of approval](#)

[Regulation 32 - Retention and confidentiality of records](#)

[Schedule 5 - Matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements](#)

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

[STANDARD 13.8,9 - Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children](#)

## RELATED GUIDANCE

[Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#)

## SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter explains the process by when there is a change in the fostering household, such as a new partner or new child.

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### 1. Introduction

Single foster carers may form new partnerships and significant relationships and any changes in the fostering household/circumstances need to be considered. Forming a new relationship; joining households and taking on a joint fostering role are all significant changes and require careful assessment. Forming new

relationships requires the investment of energy and time and the impact of developing relationships on a fostering household need to be reviewed to ensure that the fostering role is not adversely affected.

Some carers will have applied to foster as single carers. Their assessment should consider what would happen if they form a new partnership or develop a significant relationship. Other foster carers may experience separation or divorce whilst fostering. A re-assessment should be completed as a single carer and forming new relationships covered within this assessment.

The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that approved foster carer(s) are clear about their responsibility to notify the Fostering Service before any change in the composition of their household occurs or where there is any significant change in their circumstances which affects their fostering, for example any new relationship, pregnancy or bereavement.

Sharing information about personal/household changes are a key part of the supervisory relationship and rely on openness and transparency between carers and the fostering team. Foster carers need to understand the reasons why such information is required, how it may impact on their role, and consider the needs of children within placement.

## **2. Expectations of Carers**

Community Foster Care's Foster carers must immediately give full written notice of:

- Any intended change of the foster carer's address;
- Any intended change in the composition of their household;
- Any other change in their personal circumstance and any other event affecting either their capacity to care for any child placed or the suitability of their household; and
- Any request or application to adopt children, or for application for child minding or day care.

## **3. Initial Stages of a Relationship (no contact with foster child)**

The foster carer should let the SSW know they have begun a new relationship as a significant change in their personal circumstances, even if the relationship is at the initial stages. A relationship inevitably changes the circumstances of the foster carer and the SSW must explore with the carer the impact upon their fostering responsibilities.

A decision whether the partner to the relationship needs to be spoken to by the SSW and whether the foster child should be spoken to about their understanding

of the situation should be sensitively and carefully discussed and should be proportionate to the likely impact of the relationship upon the carer and its development in time, status and intimacy.

#### **4. New Partner is a Visitor to the Foster Home and has Contact with Foster Children**

Where a new partner becomes a visitor to the Foster Home and the visits mean that the partner has contact with foster children, the foster carer must supervise contact between a foster child and the new partner, not leaving the foster child alone. The frequency and duration of visits to the foster home should be discussed with the SSW and the impact of visits by the partner on the dynamics within the household.

The Safe Care Plan should be used and updated as necessary and risk assessment completed/updated.

If it is intended that visits to the home by a partner (but not overnights) become regular, then Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) background checks should be completed.

The child's social worker should also talk to the child about their understanding of the situation and their views.

#### **5. The New Partner Proposes to Stay Overnight**

Where the foster carer wishes his/her partner to stay overnight this should be discussed with the SSW. Before agreement to overnight stays can be given, the following actions and additional checks are required:

- Outcome of DBS background checks must be known before this can occur;
- New partner to sign agency's confidentiality agreement; SSW to discuss the requirement and importance of confidentiality;
- Sleeping arrangements should be confirmed;
- SSW to undertake a risk assessment, which should take account of, amongst other things, the number and ages of the children in the placement, their views about the foster carer's partner, the significance and stability of the relationship (including how long they have known each other) and the foster carer's history of fostering. The frequency of planned overnight stays should also be discussed;
- SSW to update the family safer care plan to include the changes in the fostering household. The plan should specify that all childcare responsibilities remain with the foster carer. The safe care plan to be

discussed with the foster carer and their partner, both should sign the document;

- The SSW should provide information to the new partner about allegations/complaints procedures;
- There should be consideration as to whether the new partner should be included in the foster carer's supervision from time to time. This would be to provide opportunity for the carer and their partner to reflect, alongside the SSW, on the new dynamics within the household, what's going well as well as, any areas of concern.

The Fostering Manager should be made aware of any agreement for overnight stays and be assured that all the actions above have been undertaken.

Once the new partner has stayed overnight on more than 6 occasions, the following additional checks should be undertaken:

- SSW to complete statutory checks and seek references (two personal and one paid employment). References should also be sought from any former partners where there have been children parented/care for, within that relationship;
- Partner and carer are invited to attend the next available 'skills to foster' preparation course; the course should be completed as a couple so that the content can be discussed within their partnership and consideration given together around their own particular situation;
- Partner to complete safeguarding training; this can be online;
- Consideration is given to the new partner making an application to foster – this should be kept under regular review and discussed in supervision.

## **6. Before a New Partner Moves in**

Where a new relationship by a Foster Carer is planned to change the fostering household through cohabitation, the partner must not move in until a Foster Carer Assessment has been completed and presented to the Community Foster Care Council Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker. During the assessment process the foster carer remains the approved carer and responsible for the duties this entails until any changes are made by the Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Assessment will be a fresh fostering assessment of the household and not be an addendum or add on to the existing fostering assessment. It will be

an opportunity for the existing carer to have a re-evaluation both as an individual and as a couple/ in this new relationship.

On occasion there may be (exceptional) circumstances when a new partner moves into the household before a full assessment has been completed. In these circumstances a Fostering Review must be convened. The change in household must be presented to the next available Fostering Panel highlighting the change in circumstances and timescale for full assessment agreed. The Safe Care Plan and Risk Assessment must be updated.

### **7. Foster Carer Proposed to Join New Partner's Household**

Foster carer(s) should inform their SSW of any planned changes of accommodation including moving to a new partner's home/setting up a new home together. The proposed change of circumstances should be presented to the next available Fostering Panel.

### **8. Changes to the Household without Notification**

If the supervising social worker discovers that there has been a change in the foster carer's household without prior notice, the manager must be informed and an immediate review of the foster carer's approval must be convened - see [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#). In these circumstances, a suspension of the foster carer's approval may have to be considered at the review. The child/children's social worker and IRO should be informed.

### **9. Children Currently Placed within the Foster Home**

Children currently in placement should not be routinely moved from a foster placement that has a change in household unless it is consistent with their plan or other issues necessitate a change of placement.

### **10. New Placements**

The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (11.2) highlights that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. New placements should not normally be made when changes to the household are being assessed.