

## Overview

It is inevitable that there will be times that you have to exercise some form of control over your foster child just as you do your own children. Hopefully such occasions will be few and far between, but when they do arise you will need to think carefully about what strategies to employ.

As a foster carer you have signed an agreement to say you will not use corporal punishment on any child placed in your care.

The term corporal punishment should be taken to cover an intentional application of force as punishment including smacking, slapping, pinching, squeezing, shaking, throwing missiles, rough handling and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. It also includes punching or pushing in the heat of the moment in response to violence from young people.

This does not prevent you from taking necessary physical action where any other course of action would be likely to fail to avert an immediate danger of personal injury to the child or another person or to avoid immediate serious damage to property. All incidents must be recorded and reported to your social worker and the child's social worker immediately.

Denial of food must not happen. It is well established that the enjoyment of eating and drinking is fundamental to a child's healthy physical and emotional development. Meal times are an important social occasion in the life of a child and it would be inappropriate for a child to be refused meals. Deprivation of food and drink should be taken to include the denial of access to the amounts and range of foods and drinks normally available to children in your home.

This does not prevent you from withholding specific food or drinks on medical advice.

Personal medicines must continue to be administered as must going to the doctor or dentist as necessary. No other form of medicines such as drugs intended to quieten the child and no other unnecessary medical or dental treatment must be given.

No child should be deliberately deprived of sleep and children must not be kept locked up in their own or other rooms.

Fines (other than a Court fine) may not be used as a punishment, but up to two thirds of a child's pocket money may be withheld to pay for any damage they may have caused with the social workers consent. However, on any occasion where a child's pocket money is withheld as a sanction for non-compliance, the money should always be added to their savings.

Restriction of contact visits to and from the child's family and friends should not be used as a punishment nor should the withholding of receiving or sending of letters, or making telephone calls to such people. No children should be prevented from getting in contact with their social worker, Children's Guardian, solicitor, Independent Visitor or the Complaints Officer.

Children must not be made to wear clothes that draw attention to themselves, for example, pyjamas during the day.

There are many different techniques that you have or will acquire to help children who are not behaving as expected. The strategy to be used in any given situation will vary from child to child and situation to situation. Praising, positive re-enforcement and the use of rewards are often effective.

Whatever methods you employ, it is vital that you are consistent and give the child a clear message as to why their behaviour is unacceptable and what they must do. You will also need endless patience and good humour as well as the support of others. Your own family, friends and other carers will be important sources of support, but you should not hesitate to seek help from the child's social worker or your supervising social worker.

## The use of physical interventions

Physical intervention can take a number of forms. These can be defined as physical presence, non-restrictive contact, and restraint.

### ***Physical presence***

This is where a foster carer, through their physical presence, intervenes in order to influence a child or young person, but does not touch them or prevent them from leaving an area. This could include standing in their way or blocking an exit in order to try to engage in a conversation, but allowing the child or young person to pass if they insist.

## ***Non-restrictive contact***

This refers to situations where a foster carer has physical contact with a child against their will, but where the child retains a large degree of freedom and mobility and can break away from the carer if they wish. They are not overpowered and have options to move away from the carer. This might include taking a child's hand or putting an arm around their shoulder to physically guide them away from a situation, or pulling a child away from another child they are trying to hit in order to get between them.

It is important to understand that normal parenting activity with toddlers and younger children will inevitably involve non-restrictive contact, such as physically re-directing a toddler from trying to join his older sister as she plays in an organised school football match. Similarly, depending on their mood, amongst other things, a child might object and resist if a parent insists on holding their hand near road traffic. This describes routine parenting activity appropriate to the age and development of the child.

It is important to be absolutely clear that non-restrictive contact is permissible in law, and may need to be used by carers in a similar way to how it is used by birth parents. If a seven-year-old is told that they cannot have ice-cream until after their dinner, but refuses to accept this and tries to access the freezer, it is entirely appropriate to physically intervene and move them away. This is a proportionate response, and the behaviour of a good parent.

## ***Restraint***

Physical restraint refers to the foster carer using direct physical force to overpower and prevent or significantly restrict the movement of a child or young person against their will. Restraint must only ever be used for the purposes of preventing harm to the person being restrained, harm to other people, or to prevent significant damage to property. It might be used in an unpredicted emergency or as part of an agreed plan with a particular child or young person.

It is important to understand that babies and toddlers will be restrained by parents and foster carers in the course of normal family life. The most obvious example is using a car seat or booster chair to prevent injury to the child. On other occasions, a good parent will simply hold a small child securely for the purposes of keeping them safe. So restraint in the context of this procedure does not include this normal age-appropriate parenting with babies and toddlers.

More information, including case studies, legal context and additional reading can be viewed in the Coram/BAAF Practice Note 63: [Restraint and physical intervention in foster care](#).

## **Recording of physical restraints**

All incidents involving physical restraint must be recorded as detailed above.

You will need to exercise your own judgment as to when other forms of control and discipline warrant recording.

Some of the issues you need to take into account include:

- Did the child view the action taken as fair and appropriate?
- Was the action taken discussed with and/or witnessed by others?
- Was the action taken agreed by the child's social worker and/or birth parents?
- Could any other party misconstrue the action taken or view it as inappropriate?

If you are in any doubt about whether any action taken should be recorded or not, then this is probably an indication that it should. In such circumstances you should record the incident and bring it to the attention of the child's social worker at the earliest possible opportunity.

There will on very rare occasions be children who are so out of control that their behavior poses a risk to themselves or others or major damage to property. In such circumstances you should contact the Police as well as the child's social worker or, out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team.