



## **Assessment of Dogs and Pets Procedure**

### **Best Practice Guidance**

CoramBAAF Practice Note 42 Placing Children with Dog-Ownning Families

CoramBAAF publication 'Dogs and pets in fostering and adoption' by Paul Adams

CoramBAAF Dog Assessment and CoramBAAF Pet Assessment

Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

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### **1. Introduction**

There has been a number of high-profile incidents reported relating to dog attacks on children. The suitability of all dogs in fostering situations needs to be carefully considered.

This guidance provides advice about the assessment of prospective foster carers who are dog/pet owners and of approved carers who become dog/pet owners. Specific guidance is given on prohibited dangerous dogs and other potentially dangerous dogs. The key risks and benefits are outlined with signposts for more detailed information if required.

Supervising Social Workers need to be aware that a small minority of owners of dangerous dogs cannot become foster carers (unless they agree to the removal of such dogs). For other prospective foster carers who are dog/pet owners, a risk assessment is undertaken with the safety of a child as paramount, but that also takes account of the potential benefits to a child placed.

Matching a child with approved foster carers who are dog/pet owners will obviously need to take account of the child's history, possible fear of dogs or other animals, or ill treatment of animals and the child's particular needs.

Provided appropriate consideration is given to a child's safety, ownership of dogs and pets can bring many benefits to children within a fostering household.

Applicants should be advised to read CoramBAAF Practice Note 42 Placing Children with Dog-Owning Families and refer to the CoramBAAF publication 'Dogs and pets in fostering and adoption' by Paul Adams if they have a dog in the family or have regular visitors to the home with dogs.

## **2. Prohibited Dangerous Dogs**

Dogs of the following breeds cannot be imported into Guernsey:

- Pit Bull Terrier
- Japanese Tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro

Pit Bull type dogs can be called:

- American Staffordshire Terriers (Am Staffs)
- Irish Staffordshire Bull Terrier (ISBT)
- Irish Blue or Red Nose

Also, some kinds of American Bulldogs have been found to be Pit Bulls.

If an applicant owns any of the above dangerous dogs, the Family Placement Service are not able to assess her/him to become a foster carer (unless s/he wishes not to have such a dog in their home). If an approved foster carer acquires one of the above dogs, their approval would need to be terminated if s/he was not prepared to cease ownership.

### **3. Other Potentially Dangerous Dogs**

Special caution should also be observed when assessing households containing the following:

- Alsatian (German Shepherd)
- Rottweiler
- Doberman
- Bulldog
- Neapolitan Mastiff
- Japanese Akita
- Or a 'pack' of dogs (more than three dogs)

Where any of the above breeds of dogs are kept or where there are three or more dogs in the home (defining a 'pack'), either a specialist dog behavioural risk assessment must be completed or Veterinary references must be obtained.

In the event of an approved foster carer acquiring one of the above dogs or if numbers of dogs within the household increases to three or more, a specialist assessment or Veterinary references must be undertaken.

Foster carers should inform their Supervising Social Worker with regard to their intention to obtain a dog or potentially dangerous pet or where concerns arise regarding an existing pet. The potential risk should be considered or reviewed.

Specialist assessments are undertaken by the GSPCA following referral by the assessing or Supervising Social Worker.

#### **4. Key Risk Assessment Issues**

CoramBAAF consider this issue should be approached from a health and safety perspective and a risk assessment conducted.

The CoramBAAF Dog Assessment and the CoramBAAF Pet Assessment is used for this purpose. This must be completed for all applicants as part of the assessment process for all prospective foster carers, annually for registered foster carers where there are dogs or pets within the household and at any time where there are changes to dog/pet ownership within the household or where concerns arise

Where concerns arise through the Dog or Pet Questionnaire or at any other time the Guernsey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (GSPCA) will carry out an assessment of the animal concerned and provide a report to the Family Placement Service.

Key points to consider are:

- How and where are the dogs or animals to be kept?
- Will they be accessible to the foster child in any way?
- What will be the risks to the health and safety of the foster child/young person?
- The prospective foster carer should be asked how s/he would feel and react if their dog/animals were 'hurt' by a foster child/young person
- Additional caution should be exercised where young children may be placed e.g. for Parent and Child placements and children under 5.

As part of the assessment/review, consideration should also be given to the breeding of animals and or working animals in relation to the impact of the welfare of the child/young person.

In the majority of situations a well-informed assessor will have the relevant skills and knowledge to satisfactorily complete the Dog /Pet Assessment alongside the prospective foster carer. In the event that the assessor does not feel confident to do so, or where there may be potential risks highlighted a specialist assessment or Veterinary references must be obtained.

## **5. Assessment of Dogs or Other Animals**

The safety of the child to be placed should be paramount. It is the responsibility of the prospective dog owner to demonstrate the dog's ability to cope with children and that s/he has a responsible attitude and good understanding of the issues involved. Responsible dog owners should not mind a check being made on the dog, as well as a check on their suitability to be carers.

It is important to know whether the dog has lived with children, still lives with children or has any experience of children. The prospective carer should be asked, 'Was this experience positive?'

The size of a dog is important, especially where vulnerable children are involved. However, small dogs can be snappy and the suitability depends on a particular dog's temperament.

It should be borne in mind that all dogs have the potential to be dangerous and that children can provoke attacks from dogs or may themselves cause harm to dogs or other pets in the household. Foster carers must be able to supervise both the child and dog at all times, to prevent dangerous situations arising.

Social Workers need to be aware of their own attitudes towards dog and pet ownership and how this might affect their approach when completing the Dog and Pet assessment, combined with ongoing consideration of dogs and pets during the assessment of the prospective foster carer.

Social Workers should remain aware of everyday interaction between owners and pets and how the pet fits into the family dynamics and routines, considering both benefits and risks as to how this might impact on a child placed in a fostering household.

Other animals may be kept by foster carers and these will be considered on an individual basis during the assessment. Animals which have been registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 will rule out the use of an applicant's home for foster care.

## **6. Positive Aspects of Dog/Pet Ownership**

Whilst carrying out a risk assessment of a prospective carer's dog/pet, the obvious potential benefits of a dog/pet matched appropriately with a child in placement should also be taken into account, which include:

- A source of companionship and unconditional affection
- An element in a secure family base and family membership
- Exploring taking responsibility and caring
- Provision of leisure opportunities and physical well-being
- Emotional repair work for some children who have experienced rejection, neglect or abuse

### **Further Advice**

You may wish to look at the [GOV.UK website](#) which has information on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and those breeds classified by this Act with pictures of the dangerous dogs. You may also wish to look at [CoramBAAF website](#) and read Practice Note 42 Placing Children with Dog-Owning Families and refer to the CoramBAAF publication 'Dogs and pets in fostering and adoption' by Paul Adams.