

**Manchester Family Placement Service**

# **Health and Safety**

**Standards and guidance for foster carers,  
prospective adopters and supervising social  
workers**

**February 2009  
Updated October 2011**

*The term, " foster carer" also applies to prospective adopters unless otherwise stated. Children placed with prospective adopters are Looked After Children.*

## **GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FOSTER CARERS**

### **National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011**

#### **Standard 10 – Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child**

**Outcome:** *Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.*

10.1 The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child.

10.2 The foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. Outdoor spaces which are part of the premises are safe, secure and well maintained.

10.3 Foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.

10.4 Foster carers understand the service's policy concerning safety for children in the foster home and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The service's policy is regularly reviewed in line with the most recent guidance from relevant bodies.

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

10.6 In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

## Interpretation of the Standards

The National Minimum Standards for foster care require health and safety checks to be carried out on all newly approved foster and adoptive homes and updated annually during the time children are in placement. It is the responsibility of Manchester's Family Placement Service to ensure that foster homes meet health and safety standards by undertaking these regular checks and completing a **Full or Standard Health and Safety Check** with the foster carer or prospective adopter.

It is the responsibility of the supervising social worker to ensure that the health and safety checklist is completed, but supervising social workers are not health and safety trained and do not usually hold expert knowledge about building alterations, gas or electrical maintenance. The foster carer must therefore ensure that their home is well maintained and continues to meet the health and safety standards, which are laid down in these guidelines.

Supervising social workers will advise on the essential and recommended requirements necessary to ensure safety. Essential requirements are information or items which **must** be provided prior to approval or re-approval. Recommended requirements are those which are advisable and therefore good practice. The supervising social worker will identify with the foster carer any hazards which might cause harm to children or young people in placement with reference to their age, understanding and ability.

Foster carers are expected to provide accurate and up to date information to their supervising social workers at the time of the check and make a record in their "Foster Carer's Health and Safety Log Book."

Foster carers are advised to make routine checks on their home for potential dangers and to educate the children in their care to become safety conscious both within and outside of the home. Young children, especially those under three years, cannot be expected to remember and understand safety advice and will need to have an adult nearby at all times. Some looked after children may have come from homes where they have been allowed to take on responsibilities such as, cooking or use dangerous equipment at an inappropriate age and will need to re-learn how to do these tasks safely with adult supervision.

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## Introduction

The following guidelines are for all Manchester foster carers and prospective adopters and should be read before completing the Full and Standard Health and Safety Check. It has been designed to help foster carers, adopters and their families care for looked after children safely inside and outside of the home and whilst on holiday.

Foster carers should also bear in mind these health and safety guidelines when taking looked after children to visit friends or relatives.

## Essential Requirements

### 1. General Household Conditions

The foster home should be in general good repair and the supervising social worker should be notified of any new or ongoing building work such as, extensions or loft conversions.

All alterations to the foster carer's home should meet building and fire regulations and evidence of compliance with regulations should be shown to the supervising social worker.

There should be no evidence of damp or mould on surfaces. For example, near internal windows, skirting boards or on external facing walls.

In general, the home environment both externally and internally should be decorated to an acceptable standard and walls and painted surfaces should be clean and intact.

The property must be in the foster carer's name that is, mortgaged or tenanted.

#### **a) Insurance**

All foster carers' homes must have current contents insurance as damage caused by looked after children and young people in events related to the fostering task will only be covered by the City Council in exceptional cases. Please refer to the Foster Carer Agreement for details.

#### **b) Gas**

It is essential that foster carers who are homeowners ensure that a Corgi registered company carries out the installation of any gas appliances (for example, boilers and gas fires) and that a safety service is carried out annually.

Gas leaks, (carbon monoxide inhalation) and faulty boilers can cause fatalities. For foster carers living in rented accommodation, (privately rented, housing association or council), this will be the responsibility of the landlord.

The supervising social worker will ask to see any available safety reports, certificates or annual service contracts at the time of the Full and Standard Health and Safety Check.

No portable gas or paraffin heaters should be used on the premises.

### **c) Carbon Monoxide Disc Testers/Alarms**

It is recommended that foster carers buy and fit carbon monoxide detectors or alarms especially if there are gas fires or heaters fitted. Carbon monoxide disc detectors and alarms can be purchased from local DIY, hardware stores or supermarkets and should be placed in the vicinity of any gas appliances or as recommended by the manufacturer. Carbon Monoxide disc detectors have a limited life and will need replacing every 2-3 months. Alarms are permanent units and do not require regular replacing.

### **d) Electricity**

It is recommended that all foster carers should have an electrical safety certificate for their home. Certificates are normally valid for five years. For foster carers living in rented accommodation this will be the responsibility of the landlord or the council.

The supervising social worker should check the validity date of any electrical safety certificates.

Foster carers are responsible for ensuring the upkeep and maintenance of all electrical appliances and equipment. All electrical sockets should be securely fixed to the wall and have child resistant covers depending upon the age and the needs of the children in placement. Sockets should not be overloaded, there should be no uncapped "live" wires and cube adaptors should not be used.

Young children should not be left unattended where there are hot electrical appliances in use such as irons and hair straighteners.

### **Gas and Electricity checks – costs**

Foster carers in their own privately owned homes can request the reimbursement of the cost of gas and electricity checks. Foster carers should apply to their supervising social workers with an invoice/receipt for the check which must be carried out by a qualified electrician or registered gas installer.

### **e) Oil**

Any oil fired heating equipment must have been checked regularly by a qualified person and evidence of inspection provided. The oil storage container must be stored separately, fenced off and have a suitable casing to retain spillages.

### **f) Water Supply**

Foster carer's drinking water supply must be delivered from the rising main (main supply) direct to the taps, not from a storage water tank. The isolation tap (stop tap) must be accessible and in good working condition in the event of an emergency.

### **g) Fire Safety**

All foster homes should have or be in the process of being checked by the Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service (GMF&RS) or the local fire service if the foster carer resides outside of Greater Manchester, for an assessed evacuation plan of

their home and suitable smoke detection systems.

All foster homes should have at least one smoke detector on each floor of the house. They regularly tested and will you be asked if they are in working order by the supervising social worker at the time of the Full or Standard Health and Safety Check.

All members of the foster carer's family and looked after children should be made aware of an escape plan in the event of a fire and how to evacuate the house in an emergency. The escape route should be stated in the foster carer's Health and Safety Log Book.

### **Fire safety blankets and fire extinguishers.**

Greater Manchester Fire Service recommends that householders should leave the premises immediately there is a fire and call the Fire Brigade and should not delay by attempting to put out the fire with fire extinguishers or fire blankets.

Foster carers should ensure that all soft furnishings conform to British Standards and current Fire Retardant legislations. It is advisable to check the age of the furniture. Some foam filled furniture manufactured pre-1988 may be unsafe and give off toxic fumes in the event of a fire. If it is not possible or feasible to replace these, ensure all other aspects of fire safety are continually and carefully monitored.

Ensure furniture is not located too close to any open flames or heating appliances. Guards should be in place where possible.

**Candles** should be stored out of reach of children and should not be placed in bedrooms. If candles are used for aromatic purposes they should be installed in the appropriate apparatus to self extinguish when burnt out and to prevent toppling over. Candles should be stored safely and only be used in the event of a power failure. Children should not be allowed scented candles, joss sticks or oil burners in bedrooms.

### **h) Alarm and Key Security**

Home alarm systems are usually zoned or chimed. Any young person who is deemed capable of using the system (by the supervising social worker) must be shown how to use it accordingly.

Foster carers should ensure that all house and car keys are kept safely, especially overnight. All external door keys should not be left in locks but should be easily accessible in case of an emergency.

## **2. General Household Issues**

### **a) Smoking**

All foster carers and prospective adopter's homes must be smoke free. No household member or visitors should smoke in the home or in any enclosed space (including cars and caravans) where children are present or are likely to be present.



All cigarettes, smoking materials, matches and lighters should be kept out of reach of children in a secure place.

All foster carers and prospective adopters will be expected to sign the Smoke Free Home Agreement. Refer also to the Anti-Smoking Policy and 'Safe Caring Policy and Guidance for Foster Carers' section on smoking.

### **b) Alcohol**

Alcohol should be stored safely away from the reach of children. It should be drunk only occasionally and moderately in the presence of children.

Refer to the "Safe Caring Policy and Guidance for Foster Carers" section on alcohol.

### **c) First Aid/Infection**

A first Aid box containing the recommended items should be available in each foster home and the supervising social worker will ask where this is located at time of the Full or Standard Health and safety Check.

This is a suggested contents list: equivalent but different items will be considered acceptable:

2 or more individually wrapped adhesive dressings (assorted sizes)
2 sterile eye pads
2 or more individually wrapped bandages - triangular and roll bandages
Medical tape
Gauze pads for cleaning
2 or more pairs of disposable plastic gloves
Antiseptic wipes (alcohol free)

Scissors, tweezers etc. can be kept separately in a safe cupboard.

With the exception of prospective adopters, all foster carers should as a minimum have been trained in 1 Day Emergency First Aid with Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) (for children and young people) or equivalent. Evidence of current certification will be required. (Within the past 2 years).

All foster carers should know how infections are transmitted and how to respond hygienically to bodily fluids such as vomit, spillages of blood, urine and faeces. Advice on managing the risks of infection and cross infection is addressed in the First Aid course which all foster carers are expected to complete.

### **d) Medicines**

Prescribed and over the counter medicines must be stored safely, preferably in a locked cabinet. Foster carers are advised to make a note of the quantity and use by adults in the household of painkillers such as aspirin and paracetamol, vitamin and mineral supplements, which can all be toxic to children in large doses. Some prescribed medicines, (such as anti-biotics), may need to be stored at a certain temperature and may therefore need to be refrigerated.

All foster carers are expected to record any medication administered, (including non-prescribed medicines), on the Child's Medication Sheet and noted in the Child's Weekly Record Sheet. Supervising social workers will collect completed medication sheets at supervision visits.

Please see the "**Fostering Service Medication Policy and Procedure**" for more information on over the counter and prescribed medicines.

#### **e) Fragile objects**

All fragile objects, such as china and glassware should be stored out of reach of small children preferably in a cupboard or cabinet.

#### **f) Firearms/Ornamental weapons**

If foster carers wish to retain firearms on the premises for recreational purposes, they will be required to provide evidence of authorisation from the Police or recognised agency.

Ornamental knives, swords, crossbows and other weapons should not be displayed or held on the premises. Foster carers would be advised to sell or dispose of them.

#### **g) Hazardous Objects**

Any large or sharp scissors should not be made available to young children. However, children aged 7 and over (depending upon their understanding) should be taught how to use small scissors or play scissors safely. Foster carers must ensure that the child is capable of understanding the dangers of misusing sharp tools. Children should be advised not to run around with them or use them as playthings.

#### **h) Inappropriate Materials**

There should be no pornographic, indecent, offensive materials, for example, books, videos, DVD's on the premises.

#### **i) Valuables**

Any possessions that are considered valuable should not be left lying about the premises and should be locked away securely from children and young people.

### **3. External Conditions**

#### **a) Garage**

If garages are present they need to be in good condition and free from hazards. Garage doors should be locked to prevent access by young children.

Any tools or equipment stored must be out of reach from children and preferably locked away from sight.

Cleaning products or chemicals must also be stored and locked in suitable containers or cupboards with restricted access.

#### **b) Garden/Paths**

Ensure the garden paths are in good condition, free from debris and faeces and that all surfaces are level.

Ensure all rubbish and garden waste is kept in appropriate containers.

All garden areas, yards, hard standing, paths and walkways should be evenly surfaced and free from rubbish or building materials.

Washing lines and rotary driers can be seen as potential play objects and should be set at a height which is not accessible to young children who may attempt to swing on them. To be removed when not in use.

Care should be taken to remove or cut back sharp bushes and plants and young children should be supervised in the garden to ensure they do not injure themselves or ingest poisonous plants or berries.

### **c) Walls**

Garden and perimeter walls should be safe and stable. There should be no sharp edges, loose mortar, loose coping-stones or bricks.

Trellis type fencing should preferably be removed to prevent young children from climbing.

Gates should be lockable and in good condition and working order.

### **d) Fences**

Fences should be well maintained and stable, without protruding nails, sharp pieces of wood or metal. Gaps should be no more than 10cms/100mm (4") and the panels must be safe and secure.

### **e) Outbuildings**

Garden ponds must be securely covered or suitably fenced off to prevent young children and toddlers from falling in.

All garden and DIY equipment, tools, garden chemicals and garden seeds must be stored in a locked shed, greenhouse or garage.

### **f) Barbeques**

Children should not be left unattended near a barbeque when it is in use and whilst it is cooling down.

Barbeque equipment and gas bottles must be stored safely in a shed away from direct heat or sun.

Storage of hazardous substances such as, oil (for cars or heating), paint and other decorating materials should be stored in a locked shed or garage.

### **g) Play Equipment**

Swings, slides and climbing frames and any other play equipment should be secured to the ground and well maintained. Regular maintenance checks should be taken to

ensure that the equipment is in good repair, especially after winter.

Children should be supervised when playing in paddling pools or with sand in sandpits. Sandpits should be covered when not in use.

All play equipment should be situated on appropriate soft flooring such as grass, sand, rubber matting or play bark.

(See Trampoline Safety)

## **4. Accommodation (For all internal rooms)**

### **a) Safety Gates**

To be used at the top and bottom of stairs and open doorways (specifically, kitchens). Follow installation instructions. All gates should have non-flexible vertical rods of no more than 6 cm apart. Do not place pressure gates at the top of stairs as these are not bolted to the wall and a child can push them over.

Gates should be no less than three quarters of the child's height and are not usually suitable after the age of two years.

Avoid placing furniture nearby onto which the child could climb and thereby mount the gate.

### **b) Hall/ Stairs and Cellars**

All hall and stairs should have sufficient amount of lighting or illumination to allow safe access and exit. All flooring should be in good condition and fixed securely.

Cellars that are used only for storage must be out of bounds to young children.

All steps at the front and back of the house should be well lit and free from obstructions. Specific attention should be paid to the incline of all steps to ensure that their steepness does not cause a safety risk to any child in placement

Internal staircases, including attic and cellar stairs, should be in good repair and all banisters or rail fixed securely to the wall. Banisters should be filled in or have a maximum gap between rails of 4" or 100mm/10cms.

### **c) Windows/Glass Doors**

All windows are in good repair with no cracked or loose panes. It is recommended that window locks or window restrictors are fitted on upstairs windows to prevent the window being fully opened by a young child.

Move any furniture that can be used by a small child to climb up to an open window.

Preferably, all large areas of glass should be safety glass (does not splinter when broken) and additional safety precautions, such as glass markers should be applied to alert children to the glass and prevent them walking into it.

#### **d) Doors**

Care should be taken to ensure that all doors are in good condition and in working order. Lower edges on doors should be smoothed down to prevent risk of splinters to children who have a tendency to support themselves against furniture and fittings.

Where there are glass door panels, safety glass must be fitted to the bottom half door to prevent injury.

Any intention to fit locks on internal doors to prevent access to others, should be discussed firstly with the supervising social worker. Any locks that are fitted should be unlockable from both sides.

#### **e) Living Areas**

The living rooms should be warm, comfortable and provide sufficient space for the whole family to eat or relax in. If there is no separate dining area or a dining kitchen, then suitable small tables must be in place to enable the family to eat together.

If children wish to do their homework in a living area and there is available space to provide this, then a table and chair in a well-lit room should be provided.

All living areas should be maintained at a comfortable temperature and all heating appliances should be fixed to the wall. Depending on the age and needs of the child, open fires and all gas and electric fires should all be covered by a fireguard and fixed to the wall.

Floor coverings including carpets, tiles and lino should be securely fixed and evenly laid. Soft furnishing should be in good condition and conform to relevant British Standards.

#### **f) Children's Bedrooms**

Consideration needs to be given to any risks arising from children being placed in bedrooms on a different floor from the foster carer. Young children, under 11 years should, as far as possible, be placed in bedrooms on the same floor as the foster carer to enhance levels of adult supervision at night.

Foster children over three years should have their own bedroom unless sharing with a sibling. Only if there are exceptional circumstances will consideration be given to two unrelated children sharing a bedroom. For example, children placed in an emergency with family or friend foster carers.

It is not advisable for children already in placement or birth children to share a bedroom with a child coming into placement, even if this is a time-limited placement. Permissible exceptions are where a written individual risk assessment has been carried out by the supervising social worker prior to placement and agreed by a team manager. This will include consultation with birth children in the household and any other children placed and must also involve discussions about health and safety and safe caring issues.

The supervising social worker will view each foster child's bedroom at the foster care's supervision visit (every three months).

Children's bedrooms should have:

- Appropriate floor covering
- A suitable bed for each child
- A wardrobe
- Drawers
- Shelves and storage space
- Curtains or blinds
- Sufficient lighting for playing, reading and studying

All clothing should be suitable for the ages and size of the child or young person, in good condition and sufficient for their needs. There should be a variety of clothing available to respond to changes in seasons. See separate, "Clothing Guidance for Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers."

Whether the child has their own bedroom or is sharing, there should be sufficient space for personal belongings and to display photographs and posters. Children should have towels and bed linen of their choice or for younger children, bed linen that is age appropriate.

If the bedroom is being used as a study or play room, there should be evidence of books, toys and games which are suitable for the age of the child or young person and in good condition.

**g) Beds** All children should have their own beds. All beds should preferably be positioned away from a radiator or window.

It is recommended that children over eight years of different sexes should not share a bedroom even if siblings, unless there is a plan in place to move to separate bedrooms or onto an alternative placement within six months of the child's eighth birthday.

Foster children's bedrooms should be furnished and decorated to the same standard as the foster carer's own children.

#### **h) Bunk-beds**

If children are sleeping in bunk beds, the top bunk should be situated away from light fittings.

Top bunks should have guardrails fitted on both sides. Rails should be no more than 70mm apart and at least 160mm high. The top mattress should have a firm foundation and mattress ties should not hang down to the bottom bunk.

An access ladder should be fixed securely to the frame. Top bunks are not suitable for children under 6 years for safety reasons.

Over 14's should only sleep in a bunk bed if their height and weight is suitable for the size and strength of the bed:

- a. Head and feet not touching head/foot board of bed at the same time.
- b. Weight of child needs to be assessed individually by foster carer

### **i) Babies 0-12 months**

Department of Health guidance recommends that to minimize the risk of sudden unexplained death (cot death), babies from birth until the age of 6 months should share a bedroom with the foster carer (a cot placed in the foster carer's bedroom), but should preferably be sleeping in their own bed in a separate bedroom by the age of one year.

Foster carers will not be approved to care for babies over 12 months unless there is a spare bedroom in the house. In exceptional circumstances, foster carers without a spare bedroom may be re-approved to care for specific named babies approaching or over 12 months if there is a plan to move the child to another placement.

The decision as to when a child is ready to move into a bed should be based on an individual assessment of the child's size and their ability to get in and out bed by themselves. Once the baby makes a transition from a cot to a bed, a bed guard will help to stop the child from rolling onto the floor.

Consideration should be made to retaining stair gates until the child is able to manage any stairs safely.

### **j) Cots**

Regularly check the cot for loose or missing parts and ensure that screws and bolts are fastened. Always lock the side rail in its raised position when the child is in place. Keep the cot away from window curtains or cord blinds and do not use or remove cot bumpers, pillows and large soft toys as these can cause strangulation and suffocation.

### **k) Mattresses**

Ensure the cot mattress is firm, flat, well fitting and clean. The mattress should be a breathable type with a washable cotton cover or PVC cover. Ensure that PVC covered mattresses are washed clean with warm, soapy water and re-placed if worn or torn. All mattresses should be re-placed at least yearly if in constant use. Short term or emergency carers can re-use PVC mattresses for different baby placements if the mattresses are cleaned thoroughly. Other types of breathable mattresses should be re-placed if a new placement is made.

Please see foster carer's "Safe Caring Policy" and "Safe Caring Agreement" for **safe sleeping practice for babies and children up to two years.**

### **l) Moses Baskets**

Young babies up to 2 months old can be placed to sleep in a Moses Basket on a stand or if the basket is placed in a cot. There should be space at the baby's head and feet and room to ensure ventilation. The guidance on Safe Sleeping practice for Babies also applies to the use of Moses Baskets.

Care should be taken to ensure that the basket is stable and cannot be easily toppled over and should therefore not be used for babies who are old enough to roll over.

If the Moses basket has handles, these must be long enough to meet in the middle to ensure a tight grip when the basket is being carried.

### **m) Windows**

Care should be taken to ensure that all windows in children's bedrooms are in good repair and that window locks or window restrictors are fitted to prevent the window being fully opened by a young child. If window locks are in use, foster carers should make sure that the keys are easily available in the case of an emergency.

All curtains with tassels, tie-backs and blinds with pull cords should be shortened to prevent young children from becoming entangled and possible strangulation.

Move any furniture that can be used by a small child to climb up to an open window. There should be no large areas of glass in the bedroom.

### **n) Lofts**

If the loft is used as a bedroom then ensure that a fixed staircase is in place and it meets with current Fire Regulations.

If the loft is to be used as a bedroom for a looked after child, (following a risk assessment which has recommended that it is safe and appropriate), ensure additionally that there is evidence of building regulations. If there is no written evidence because the conversion was completed some years previously, foster carers can request this retrospectively by contacting a registered builder. Regulations cover structural stability, fire safety, access, escape, weather -proofing and ventilation.

Care should be taken to ensure that all windows are in good repair and that window locks or window restrictors are fitted to prevent the window being fully opened by a young child.

If the loft is used for any other purpose (a study or for storage) then ensure that access is safe and stable for the child/young person to use.

If the loft is used as a storage area then access must be restricted.

## **0) Kitchens and Utility Rooms**

The kitchen area, flooring and working surfaces should be undamaged, clean and free from rubbish.

Young children and toddlers are best kept out of the kitchen when it is being used for cooking and a safety gate should be fitted at the entrance. If children are old enough to participate in some of the cooking tasks, then they should be closely supervised.

Foster carers need to pay particular attention to safety in the kitchen and should make sure that all sharp knives, scissors and cooking implements are either out of



reach for children (knives in a knife block) or in a locked drawer. Kettle flexes should also be kept short and out of reach.

Chip pans and pans with boiling liquids should not be left unsupervised and all panhandles should be turned inwards to prevent children knocking or grabbing them if for any reason they are present in the kitchen.

Young children may consider chest freezers as a place to play or hide and they should therefore be locked and the key stored safely.

## **p) Bathroom and Toilet**

All foster homes should have suitable washing facilities including a basin, bath and/or shower and a toilet. These facilities must be kept clean and hygienic. Toilet paper, soap and flannels, bath and hand towels should be in supply.

Foster carers should assist a child to run bath to ensure the temperature is not so hot as to scald. If there is a thermostat, it is recommended that it is set to a temperature around 43C otherwise ensure cold water is added. A bath thermometer should be used especially when babies are being bathed. Babies and small children should not be left alone in the bath as they can drown in just a few centimetres of water. Place a non-slip rubber mat in baths and showers.

Children and young people should be given advice and assistance with bathing depending upon their age, ability and level of understanding. (Privacy and Safe Caring issues in connection with a child or young person's personal hygiene are covered in the foster carer's "Safe Caring Policy and Agreement").

Shampoos, deodorants and cosmetics should be stored away from the reach of small children and razors and tweezers stored safely by the individuals who use them. Individual family members must have their own toothbrushes and should not share these or towels, flannels, razors or tweezers.

Older female children in placement should be supplied with sanitary protection and be guided on how to dispose of items hygienically either in disposable bags or in a specially provided bin.

If the bathroom or toilet has a pull cord switch for lighting, then this should be shortened or a switch fitted. (In some circumstances young people may use a long cord in a suicide attempt).

Small children can lock themselves in the bathroom or toilet by mistake. Make sure that the lock is either out of reach of small children or fix a lock that can be opened from the outside.

For foster carers with toddlers in placement, it would be advisable to fix a toilet seat lock to prevent the child from either falling in or throwing objects into the bowl.

## 5. Hygiene

### a) Food Storage

All perishable food should be covered or stored in airtight containers or in the fridge. Attention should be paid to use-by dates and storage instructions on the container. Formula milk for babies made up in sterilized bottles must be kept in the fridge and stored for no more than 24 hours. The coldest part of the fridge should be between 0C and 5C (32F and 41F).

Dried food such as pasta, nuts or pulses which can cause a child to choke should be stored in childproof containers.

### b) Housekeeping

Foster carer's homes should meet with National Minimum Standards 6.3 to foster a child or young person.

The premises should be free from debris, dirt and rubbish and should show evidence of having been regularly cleaned.

## 6. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

### Cleaning Products

Care should be taken about where cleaning fluids, polish, washing liquids; disinfectants, conditioners and bleach are stored. If they are stored in a kitchen or utility room, they should be either out of reach or in a secure cupboard. Least hazardous products should be used where possible, always check the label for direction on how to use and what to do if there are spillages, contact with skin, eyes or clothes.

## 7. Baby/ Child Equipment

All high chairs, prams and buggies should be fitted with the appropriate restraints and have a British kite mark or CE mark.

### a) High Chairs

If highchairs are purchased unassembled, ensure the instructions are read correctly for assembly.

Foster carers must ensure that it is sound, stable and fit for age, weight and size of child.

Also that:

- A harness with a post or strap to prevent slippage secures the child properly.
- That the position of the chair is free from distracting furniture and fittings, to avoid the chair toppling over.
- That the child is supervised at all times.

### b) Push Chairs/ Prams

Ensure that the Push Chair/Pram is sound, stable and fit for the age, weight and size of child. Foster carers should ensure that:

- The instructions for use are carefully followed
- The equipment is maintained in a good condition.
- That combination push chairs/prams are assembled and folded away correctly.

### **c) Play Pens/Portable Cots/ /Travel Cots**

#### **Travel cots**

Travel cots can be used for babies up to 15 kg for short periods when foster carers are on holiday or temporarily staying with family or friends. (See: d) Children's Bedrooms, for advice on Moses Baskets)

#### **Play Pens**

Foster carers can place a child in a play pen for a short period (minutes) to lessen the risk of harm to the child (i.e. when the foster carer needs to prepare food or tidy the room) but the child must be supervised by an adult at all times.

All portable cots must be in good condition, sturdy and should not collapse under pressure. The top rails should automatically lock when lifted into position. The sides of the cot should be made of close weave mesh (less than 7mm) or wooden slats, (no more than 65mm apart). Any pad or mattress provided for the base must fit snugly and additional mattresses should not be added.

Ensure that large toys and loose clothing are removed from the cot/playpen to prevent the possibility of the child accidentally becoming entangled or suffocating.

#### **Baby Walkers**

It is not advisable to use a baby walker as they can easily tip over and injure the child. Contrary to popular belief, they do not teach children to walk and can delay development. If you still wish to use a baby walker and there are special circumstances to consider, discuss these with your supervising social worker who will assess the risks and advise on additional safety measures.

## **8. Play Equipment/Toys**

Ensure that all toys and games are suitable for the age and understanding of the child and that small parts cannot be removed and swallowed (especially by children under 3 years).

Check all toys periodically to ensure that they are clean and have no broken parts or sharp edges. Do not hang toys or mobiles with strings or loops near to a cot or child's bed or allow a child to have large soft toys in bed with them.

Play involving electrically powered toys plugged into the mains (i.e. toy trains or cars) should be supervised by an adult.

Do not allow a child to have lawn darts, toy guns or crossbows, which are designed to fire missiles.

## 9. Vehicle Documentation

All vehicle documentation must be shown to supervising social worker prior to approval and at each Foster Carer Annual Review. Foster carers should ensure that their vehicle insurance is current. Whilst the majority of car insurances are comprehensive, third party insurance is acceptable.

A current MOT certificate will also be required if the vehicle is more than 3 years old.

Foster carers who arrange alternative transportation with friends or relatives must ensure they have the same level of insurance cover for carrying children and young people. See 'Safe Caring Policy and Guidance' transport section for further details.

## 10. Holiday Guidelines

Safe Caring and Health and Safety guidelines also apply to holiday accommodation and apply equally to friends and relatives who may be part of your holiday group.

**Consideration prior to trips** – Ensure that an assessment of the child or children's and young person's ability and capability is taken into account for the proposed trip.

Contact your supervising social worker or child's social worker and inform them of your travel plans.

**Additional members to the party** – Inform your supervising social worker of the names and details of those intending to go.

**Insurances** – Make sure that you and the child in placement have appropriate insurance when travelling abroad e.g. Form E111 for European Economic Community (EEC).

Check that you have a valid passport for the child and the appropriate permission to take the child out of the UK on holiday. The child's social worker will provide a letter if required.

**Arriving at Destination** – Ensure hotel staff or holiday representatives inform you of any emergency procedures, first aid, transport arrangements, access to stairs and lifts, food and welfare facilities.

Pay particular attention to the Fire Safety Regulations and Evacuation Procedures available for your location.

**Accommodation** – Do not assume that electrical and gas appliances always have the same safety features as those at home, check with the staff for instructions on use.

It would be beneficial to the safety of the group if you took a Carbon Monoxide tester for use in kitchen and sleeping areas.

Make a visual check of appliances, sockets and wiring for any scorch or burn marks,

loose or worn wirings, damaged or broken casings, evidence of tampering or faulty equipment.

**Sleeping arrangements** – If the foster child or children will be sharing a bedroom with someone they do not usually share with at home, please discuss the arrangements with the child's social worker or supervising social worker prior to booking the holiday.

**Food** – Check all fridge and freezer doors and ensure that food is covered and kept chilled.

**Safety** – Check to see if plate glass windows or doors have stickers on at child height to avoid collision, if not temporary stickers such as plasters or 'post-it' should provide adequate warning.

Check all ground floor doors and windows are locked at night and that upper floors are not accessible from neighbouring balconies. Children should not be left alone in holiday accommodation at night even for short periods.

Accommodation with balconies should be checked for safety. Young children should not be allowed on balconies without adult supervision.

Caravan windows should also be made secure and tent zips locked.

All children should be supervised in or near water even if they are competent swimmers. If you are unsure about the safety or cleanliness of the area, do not use or report it to the Holiday Company or representative.

**Sun Protection** - Children of all skin types should be protected from the sun. Use high protection sun cream (SPF 15 +) and ensure that it is re-applied after bathing.

Babies under 6 months should be kept out of the sun or placed in a pushchair with a sun-shade providing sufficient cover for their faces, hands and feet. Older children's exposure to the sun should be limited to between 11am and 3pm when the sun is overhead. Pack loose fitting tops with sleeves, sun-hats, which protect the ears and neck and sunglasses which filter out harmful ultra violet (UV) rays.

**Medicines and Consents** - If you have a child or children who are on regular medication at home then please ensure you provide sufficient amount for the trip, that is can be stored safely and at the correct temperature.

Ensure that you have a copy of the child's medical consent in case of an emergency.

Some over the counter medicines are not available in other countries, so it may be advisable to take small quantities of paracetamol or calpol with you.

## 11. Water Safety

Young children can drown even in very shallow water. An adult should supervise all children when near to pools, lakes, seashores or garden ponds.

### **At home**

Do not leave young children unattended in the bath.

Do not ask an older child to supervise. Empty the bath water immediately when finished.

### **Swimming**

Arrange for the child to have swimming lessons and to apply for life saving awards.

Ensure that learner swimmers wear a personal inflation vest when in the water and are supervised by an adult.

At the seaside or by lakes, advise about safe wading depths and advise against diving. Check the flags or symbols or consult the lifeguard to make sure that it is safe to swim. Adults should accompany children on pedaloes or small sailing crafts unless being guided by a qualified instructor.

Young people out on their own should be made aware of the dangers of swimming in canals, weirs, reservoirs, fast flowing rivers or areas of water flowing into storm drains where the risks of drowning can be underestimated.

## **12. Moving and Handling**

The Manual handling Operations Regulations apply to a wide range of moving and handling activities. This can be defined as the lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying of a load. A load is defined as an inanimate object, a box, a plant, the weekly shopping or an animate object such as a child or an animal (the dog or cat).

The lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying of a load can lead to back damage, particularly the discs in the back. Generally it is the repetition of movement that can cause damage.

Protect yourself by not carrying a load too far, take regular breaks, try to avoid twisting and turning or over- reaching while moving and handling a load. Know your own limits. If you need support or additional equipment to help you, especially if the child in placement is disabled, ask your supervising social worker.

Training is available on moving and handling and will help you to recognise good body posture to help you to protect your back.

There is a moving and handling team, based within the Manchester Equipment and Adaptations service who can be contacted for advice. Please access this service through your supervising social worker.

General advice:

- Keep any items close to your chest and abdomen as this is the strongest section of the body
- When bending down, do it from the knees and not the waist.

- Try and avoid twisting and turning from the waist, if you want to reach something – move your feet.

If any looked after children have a disability or condition that may require adaptation to assist with access, exit, mobility and use of home equipment and appliances around the home, then the foster carer must contact their supervising social worker who will arrange an assessment and installation of adaptations.

## **13. Recording and Reporting and Storage of Information**

The foster carer must comply with any procedures for recording and reporting that the Family Placement Service has in place. Any incidents affecting the child in placement should be recorded in the Child's Weekly Record Sheets

### **a) Accidents, Incidents or Dangerous Occurrences**

Any accidents, incidents or dangerous occurrences must be reported to the supervising social worker immediately. The foster carer must log it for their own records and inform the supervising social worker by following the guidance in "Serious Incidents and Notifications for Foster Carers".

### **b) Safe Storage of Information**

Any information in respect of looked after children, for example, reports, DVDs or photographs which need to be saved as part of your fostering role should only be done so on a portable storage disc and not on the computer hard drive. All disc reports and information on the child should be stored safely in a lockable box or cabinet.

Please refer to Safe Care Policy for Foster Carers "Recording and Passing on Information."

### **c) Telephones and Mobile Phones**

Foster carers should ensure that the landline is used appropriately by the child or young person as agreed with the social worker.

Advice should be given to the child or young person in correct use of the telephone and not to give out personal information

Children and young people owning mobile phones should only do so with permission from their social worker.

## **14 Car Safety**

Any organisation that arranges for other people's children to be transported has a legal duty to ensure that they are carried safely.

### **Providing Child Restraints:**

- All vehicles used to transport looked after children must have seat belts fitted.

- All vehicles used for carrying looked after children must have the appropriate child seats fitted until the child is old enough to use an adult seat belt on his/her own. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that children and young people use an appropriate child seat or wear a seat belt.

Child seats are designed for specific weight ranges of children. These broadly match different age groups, but it is the weight that is the most important.

### **Child seats can be:**

#### **Rearward facing baby seats**

(Babies up to 13kg/29lbs or 0–9 months approximately)

It is illegal and dangerous to place a rearward facing baby seat in the front seat if there is an active passenger airbag because it could injure or suffocate the child if activated. Babies will therefore need to be placed in the rear seat if an airbag is fitted.

#### **Forward facing child seats**

(Babies and children 9 -18kgs/20-40lbs or 9 months to 4 years approx)

These child seats have a 5-point harness and the top of the harness should be a shoulder height.

#### **Booster Seats**

(Children 15kgs/33lbs up-to 25kgs/55lbs or 4 to 6 years approx)

These raise the position of child to enable seatbelt to fit properly but can also provide protection from side impact. Some have high backs, which can be removed to convert into a booster cushion.

#### **Booster Cushions**

(Children 22kgs/48lbs up to 36kgs/79lbs or 6 to 11 years approx)

Adult seat belts can to be used.

Since 2006, it has been the law that all children carried in cars, vans and goods vehicles must be in an appropriate seat until they are 135 cm (4'5") tall or reached the age of 12 years, whichever comes first. They must then use a seat belt and *preferably* a booster seat until 5' in height.

Children over 14 years are considered adult passengers but it is the foster carer's responsibility to ensure that young people of this age wear a seat belt in the front or back seat.

### **Safe Condition**

Foster carers should ensure that all car seats are in good condition and are replaced about every 5 years. Second-hand car seats should not be used unless their history is known, they are in good condition and they conform to current safety standards.



From May 2008 all car seats must conform to the European Standard: R44.03 or later standard and display an “E” mark with the weight range of the child for whom it is to be used.

### **Other Vehicles**

Different rules apply in buses, coaches, licensed taxis, private hire vehicles and mini cabs

The law does not require child seats to be fitted in the above, although they must be used if fitted.

When booking a taxi, coach or minibus make sure it has seat belts and you must ask whether a child seat can be provided or whether you can use your own.

If the child is to travel in a vehicle belonging to a relative or friend ensure that it has suitable child restraints and seat belts.

For further advice and information on choosing an appropriate child car seat [www.childcarseats.org.uk](http://www.childcarseats.org.uk)

### **General Safety**

Children should always be seated and not sit on the laps of other passengers or travel without a seat belt or car seat.

Young children should not be left alone in parked vehicles even if the doors are locked.

Children under 14 should not travel in taxis on their own and must be accompanied by an adult.

## **15 Road Safety**

Children should be introduced to road safety as soon as they are old enough to walk across a road holding an adult’s hand and should certainly be familiar with the Green Cross Code before they start school.

For children under six

Some children may be unfamiliar with safety routines, so it is important to teach them the importance of holding onto an adult’s hand and not running on ahead.

Always use a pedestrian or zebra crossing and encourage the child to decide when it is safe to cross.

Explain why it is important not to cross between parked cars and to take particular care in car parks or when walking past driveways.

The Government’s “Hedgehogs” website uses interactive games, quizzes and jokes to teach children about road safety. Booklets are also available for different age groups.

### **For children over eleven**

Help the child or young person plan the safest route (with fewest roads to cross) to

the local shops, their friend's house and the journey to and from school. When crossing the road, older children can get distracted by their friends or by using a mobile phone or by listening to music and these are common causes of accidents within this age group.

Keep discussing road safety with the young person and the need to be alert when judging the speed and distance of vehicles. Discuss why they should avoid getting into cars with young inexperienced drivers (joyriding).

### **Cycle Safety**

Cycling is a good way to get to and from school and it is also good exercise, but you should make your young person aware of the dangers of cycling on busy roads.

Encourage the use of cycle paths where available.

Ensure your child's bike is the right size, well maintained, with good working brakes, lights and reflective stripes.

Ensure that the young person wears a properly fitting cycling helmet and reflective clothing in the dark.

Buy a cycle lock and advise not to leave a cycle outside unattended.

If possible, enrol the young person on a cycle safety course in your area and make sure they familiarise themselves with the layout of the local street map.

## **16. Safe Sport and Activities**

As a foster carer you play an important role in helping the children in your care to participate in activities, which are well organised and safe.

All organisations providing sports and other activities for children and young people have specific responsibilities to make sure that their staff are safe to work with children and should welcome your questions about how they will provide safe activities and a safe environment.

### **What you should look out for:**

**A Child Protection Policy** – a good club will have a published policy, which advises what should be done if a child has any concerns. Preferably they should have a club welfare officer. Ask about ground rules for behaviour and whether there is also a written code of conduct and an anti-bullying policy.

**Criminal Records Bureau Check – Ask if the club undertakes enhanced level Criminal Records Bureau Checks on all coaches including volunteers.**

You will not be allowed to see specific CRB checks but can be shown confirmation from the club's governing body that they have been undertaken.

If you have any concerns or meet with opposition, you can contact the governing body directly.

**Training and Education** – Ask if the coaches and volunteers have undertaken

training in their field as well as child protection and health and safety. For sports this may be a formal qualification through a recognised Sport National Governing Body.

**Club Accreditation** – find out if the club has an accreditation award such as “Clubmark” or National Governing Body equivalent. This will show that it has achieved a recognised national minimum standard to provide a good experience for children.

**Promoting the Child’s Welfare** – Ask about the club’s safeguards. This can include a register at the beginning and end of each session; signing children in and out and general supervision; how the club responds to disruptive behaviour and allegations of bullying; first aid provision; fire regulations; the number staff/coaches in charge in relation to the number of children; security of the building/access by members of the public and the arrangements and safety of any transport provided.

### **What you should watch for:**

- Activities whereby parents are discouraged from staying to watch. (If parents are considered a distraction, ask about viewing facilities and if there is a code of conduct for parents or carers).
- Encouragement of inappropriate physical contact.
- Individuals who show favouritism and who regularly reward specific children.
- Poor communication and a negative response to your questions about safety.
- A “win at all costs” attitude to sports or an activity.
- Individuals who do not operate within organisational guidelines.
- Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff and volunteers, one to one tuition, (or visits to their homes), telephone calls or texts directly to the child or young person.
- A child who drops out for no apparent reason.
- Photographing children for the club’s publicity.

If you have any concerns, discuss these with the child’s social worker or your supervising social worker who will advise on how best to respond.

## **17. Trampolines**

Trampolines are a form of healthy exercise and are great fun for children.

Trampolining can be enjoyed safely, if these few simple guidelines are followed:

### Buying

Models must have **safety netting** as part of the design to reduce falls.

Ensure that the trampoline comes with safety pads that completely cover the springs, hooks and frame.

### Positioning

Choose an area free from hazards. Preferably there should be a safe fall zone of at least 2.5 metres around the trampoline.

Place the trampoline on soft ground such as a lawn; bark wood chip or rubber cushioning.

Preferably place crash matting (energy absorbing) on the ground within the safe fall zone.

### Using the Trampoline

- **Never allow** more than one person on the trampoline at one time.
- Children should stand well back when waiting their turn and should not go underneath when it is in use.
- **Children under 6 must** only use trampolines suitable for their size and age range (trampolines are not suitable for very young children or toddlers).
- **No somersaults** – use an organised club who provide tuition for more complicated moves.
- **Teach children** how to get on and off safely.
- **Encourage** bouncing in the middle and **never allow** the use of bouncing to exit the trampoline.
- **Remind** children to remove jewellery or clothing or belts which may catch on netting.

### **Children should be supervised by an adult at all times**

Adult supervision is no guarantee of safety but having one or more adults in attendance can reduce the risk of falls and injuries.

## **18. Placing Children with Pet-owning Foster Carers**

The presence of animals as pets can be of benefit to children when placed in Foster Care.

Certain animals, especially dogs, can help children settle and in time they are often regarded as a friend or a member of the family.

Where foster carers or potential foster carers keep pets, the implications for the child will need to be considered as part of both the Safe Caring Agreement and the household Health and Safety Check.

## **General Health and Safety Guidance**

Ensure that adequate arrangements are in place for sleeping and feeding of pets and that such arrangements are clean and hygienic. If this is the kitchen or utility area, then carers should ensure that the area is free from odour, pet waste and hairs. Place cat litter trays away from where children can access them and away from food preparation areas. Pet food should not be left where there is a risk of a young child trying to eat it.

Children should be advised not to approach or stroke unknown or stray dogs.

Some exotic pets are known to be dangerous (e.g. certain lizards have the potential to infect humans with disease). Children should not be allowed to handle exotic pets unless it is safe to do so and there should always be a supervising adult present.

Children should learn that it is important to wash their hands immediately after handling or stroking any animal.

### **a) Pets other than dogs**

Potential foster carers need to be made aware that an assessment will not proceed if an animal kept as a pet is registered under the Wild Animals Act 1976. Existing foster carers must make arrangements to have such pets removed from the premises of the foster home.

Animals on the list include, certain types of birds, lizards and spiders and venomous snakes. A full list of animals registered is available on: [www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside](http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside).

All foster carers with acceptable pets must ensure that animals are cared for safely and hygienically. It is not advisable, for example, for small animals such as rodents in cages, to be kept in children's bedrooms. Pet hair and bedding can exacerbate asthmatic conditions in addition to being a potential source of infection.

All cats and dogs should be wormed, de-flea-ed and vaccinated as necessary or as recommended by a vet.

### **b) Dogs**

Potential foster carers who own dogs or existing foster carers who acquire a dog must undergo a dog-owning assessment and complete a questionnaire. This must be completed jointly by the supervising social worker and the foster carer early in the assessment or when an approved foster carer acquires a new dog.

The following dogs are prohibited under The Dangerous Dogs Act and these dogs **must** be removed from the foster carer's premises:

- **Japanese Towser**

- **Dogo Argentine**
- **Fila Brazilliero**

Pit Bull Terrier (not a breed but a “type” and may include Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Doberman, Rottweiler, Bullmastiff or Rhodesian Ridgeback in its make-up). Any dog described as a “Pit Bull Terrier” is therefore, likely to fall within this prohibited group but the owner may dispute this.

Foster carers who own the following breeds must undergo a thorough assessment and special caution should be exercised when agreeing to allow such breeds to remain in the household:

- **Alsatian or German Shepherd**
- **Rottweiler**
- **Doberman**
- **Bulldog**

**Also**, if the foster carer has **two or more** dogs together, this means that the dogs are regarded as a pack and will have a “pack leader” who is commonly the human owner of the dogs.

### **Pet Assessments**

An assessment of any pet will need to be carried out to identify any possible risks to the safety of children present in the household. A Dog Questionnaire must be completed with foster carers at the time of approval or if and when a new pet dog joins the family.

The child’s health in terms of any allergic reactions or anxieties in relation to a pet and overall safety, including the temperament of the animal concerned and hygiene standards will also need to be considered.

### **Referral for Independent Dog Assessments**

1. All prospective dog-owning foster carers and adopters who intend to foster or adopt children five years old or under must be referred for an Independent Dog Assessment, irrespective of the breed or type of dog.
2. If there is any doubt about the breed of the dog and that it may be a banned type/cross breed, then a referral for an Independent Dog Assessment must be made. Additionally, foster carers and prospective adopters who own Golden Retrievers, Alsatians, (German Shepherds), Rottweilers, Dobermans and Bulldogs (see notes below)
3. All prospective foster carers and adopters or current approved foster carers who own two or more dogs, that is, “a pack” will undergo an Independent Dog Assessment.
3. All dog owning prospective foster carers and adopters who do not fall into the above three categories should complete Manchester Family Placement’s Dog

Assessment with the supervising social worker.

4. In the event of approved foster carers acquiring another additional dog or where an existing dog's temperament changes and the supervising social worker/social worker observes that the dogs is aggressive or boisterous around the child in placement, then a referral should be made for an Independent Assessment

Independent dog assessment will be made by the assessing or supporting supervising social worker and the cost of the referral covered by the Family Placement Service.

### **Important considerations for the supervising social worker's assessment**

The welfare and safety of the child is the central concern of the assessment but it is the foster carer's responsibility to provide evidence that the dog is safe in the presence of children and that levels of safety and supervision are of a high standard.

It has to be acknowledged from the outset, that **all** dogs have the potential to be dangerous and that the presence of children can provoke an attack from a dog that has had no previous history of aggression.

The foster carer will need to complete the "Dog Questionnaire" to enable the supervising social worker to write the assessment and make a recommendation.

### **Guidance for completing the Dog Questionnaire:**

- ❖ **The breed of dog or type if a mixed ancestry**  
**Why?** – Many dogs are wrongly identified as breeds
  
- ❖ **Where the dog has come from - a pet shop, kennels or a rescue centre**  
**Why?** – Responsible breeders will have a record of hereditary conditions. Dogs with behaviour difficulties have often been re-homed more than once. Dogs from rescue centres may have a history of neglect and established patterns of aggressive behaviour.
  
- ❖ **The dog's experience of living with children (including details of the ages and numbers of children) either previously or currently.**  
**Why?** – Evidence is required that the dog has not got a history of aggressive or boisterous behaviour around children.
  
- ❖ **Size, age and health of the dog and its temperament (observed and described) with adults and children including:**
  - Information on vaccinations and worming and general health.
  - How the dog responds to the owner's commands.
  - What training if any, the dog has had.
  - How the dog responds to the visiting supervising social worker.**Why?** – Uncared for animals often present as more temperamental and difficult to control. An older dog may be less able to deal with change such as

the presence of strangers or young children who may be lively or noisy.

❖ **The person responsible for the care of the dog in the family in terms of feeding, exercise and routines.**

**Why?** - It is important to identify the person who maintains the dog's routine in terms of feeding and grooming.

If one or more dogs then the pack leader is the adult who takes responsibility for them in the household. Other family members are above the dog in the hierarchy and it is important that children are not given the "pack leader's" responsibilities.

❖ **Where the dog exercises and whether it has a separate fenced off area in the garden or yard for exercise.**

**Why?** – To establish whether the dog is exercised regularly enough to prevent boredom.

Does it have access to a garden or yard where children also play?  
Or does it have a separate compound?

❖ **Whether toys for the dog are kept clean and out of reach of babies and young children.**

**Why?** – For hygiene reasons and prevention of infection.

❖ **Where the dog sleeps and eats and whether the area is kept clean.**

**Why?** – As above but also, it is not advisable for a dog to sleep on the child's bed or in the bedroom especially if the child is asthmatic or has allergies.

Dogs need a separate special, safe place to sleep

❖ **What preparation needs to be undertaken by the foster carers to introduce a new child into the family in order for the child and the dog to get used to each other?**

**Why?** – Young children or children with physical disabilities may find large dogs intimidating or may risk injury from a large, active dog.

Information must be shared if the child is unused to or frightened of dogs because of previous experiences or has ever hurt an animal.

❖ **Whether the foster carers know what to do if a child is bitten by a dog**

**Why?** – Apart from administering First Aid, children may need antibiotics to prevent infection or a tetanus injection if they have not had a recent vaccination or booster.

❖ **How the foster family will react if the assessment concludes that the animal is not suitable to remain in the foster home**

**Why?** – The removal of a dog will be a significant loss to a family and may affect their positive attitude to fostering.

### **Areas of disagreement**

If areas of disagreement arise about the suitability of a dog or whether it should remain in the household, a request should be made for the foster carer to refer to a registered vet. Most vets will assess the dog's health and temperament but will



charge a fee.

For more detailed guidance see BAAF Practice Note 42 "Placing Children with Dog-Owning Families. [www.BAAF.org.uk/res/pubs/pn/index.shtml](http://www.BAAF.org.uk/res/pubs/pn/index.shtml)

### **Supervising social worker's assessment**

The conclusion of the assessment should state clearly whether the dog is considered safe in the presence of children.

## **19. Safe use of Information Technology**

### **The Internet, Games and DVDs**

The Internet is of great value to children and young people for networking, entertainment and for education but there are also potential hazards and dangers. Foster carers need to know what these are and how to deal with them.

Parenting online is similar to parenting in real life - don't let the child access anything until YOU can be sure that it is safe and the child can handle it properly.

Before children access the Internet (and this also applies to mobile phones with Internet access and games consoles) all children and young people in your care must sign the "Netsmart" pledge before accessing the computer. A copy of the pledge is printed in the child or young person's guide to foster care.

Parents and foster carers commonly deal with the following problems:

- Excessive use by children and young people leading to neglect of homework, outdoor or social activities.
- Deliberately or inadvertently accessing inappropriate materials, which are dangerous, pornographic or offensive.
- Cyber-bullying- threats, intimidation or images which cause distress to the recipient.
- Making inappropriate contact with individuals who wish to cause them harm.
- High Internet bills.

Gaining access time can be a source of conflict if a number of children share one computer. Looked after children and young people who need access for homework should be given priority and encouraged to share any free time with other children in the household by taking turns.

### **What can foster carers do?**

Familiarise yourself with how the child uses the Internet:

- Ask children to show you the places they go on the Web.
- Ask how they send e-mails. To whom and who from?
- Do they frequently access Chat Rooms or Social Networking sites?
- Do they have an online profile?
- Do they use the computer at their friends' houses?

**Install Online Software.** Software can block access to some Chat Rooms, certain types of websites and junk e-mails, (especially those with violent or sexual themes), and can control the times the Internet can be accessed.

MSN Premium Service and AOL provide parental controls but they require subscription to be paid to the company's services. Children's Chat Rooms on AOL are "moderated", that is, monitored by employees.

Free services on MSN, AOL and Yahoo do not have separate parental controls but have "privacy settings" which can filter out other people and inappropriate language. (For advice contact the Internet Rating Content Association).

All personal computers and laptops can be fitted with Manchester's approved filtering software. Contact Corporate IT (Information Technology) for advice.

**Explain** to the child or young person what your filtering software will do.

**Install a password** that allows you access and therefore control over its use.

Place the computer in a public area of the home rather than the child's bedroom so that you or another adult can supervise.

**Explain** that no-one is allowed to download or "burn" to a compact disk, MP3/4 player, ipod, mobile phone or other portable device, any music, films, photos or images from the Internet unless from approved websites or providers (such as i-Tunes or clipart) or known friends. Foster carers will need to determine whether the material is safe, appropriate and legal (in terms of copyright) to download.

**Teach** children and young people about Online Stranger Danger:

They must safeguard their own and your family's identity. Advise children:

**To Avoid Chat Rooms** – they are not suitable for young children and young people over 14 should only be allowed access if this has been agreed with the district social worker.

**Not to** create an online profile involving personal details or photographs.

**Not to** give out any personal information such as names, addresses or phone numbers. (Suggest the use of a made-up name, which does not reveal the child's name or gender).

**Not to give** any details their school, college or meeting places.

That they **must not** arrange any face-to-face meetings with anyone contacted Online.

**Not to** respond to “fake” e-mails from unknown senders who request personal information. (E-mail attachments can also spread computer viruses).

**Encourage** children and young people to talk to you if they think they are experiencing “cyber bullying” from other children who may be posting unkind messages or even photos.

Explain also that it is not acceptable to use abusive, threatening or offensive language to anyone else online.

Websites containing pornographic or racist or hate inspired language can easily be stumbled upon and children should be encouraged to inform you if this happens.

You can regularly check the history of any Internet sites visited and query if histories are frequently cleared.

Ask the school if they teach Internet safety and what safety measures they have taken in ICT lessons.

### **Blogs, Social Networking sites and Newsrooms.**

Newsrooms are electronic bulletin boards for exchanges of information on a particular subject but can attract adults pretending to be children.

**Blogs** are web diaries or notebooks inviting comments from strangers on the net.

**Social Networking** sites are where young people post their interest in a particular topic (such as music) and invite others of similar interests to converse via a computer, mobile ‘phone or online games (Xbox Live)... Anyone with an e-mail address can join the website.

Many sites have an invitation only option where two or more children who are already friends can converse privately. This is a “privacy setting” and relatively safe unless the child is drawn into private chats with unknown users.

**Profiles** – when people join a website (ie. Facebook), they create a profile which is likely to include a photo and general information about themselves  
There is currently no government legislation about online profiles but some sites ask for the parent’s or carer’s e-mail address before they will allow a child access).

Social Networking is invaluable for children in care to maintain important relationships but children can also be contacted by unknown adults and other children with whom it is not appropriate for them to have contact. It is therefore, essential that foster carers are vigilant and continue to supervise social networking sites.

Some Chat Rooms restrict entry but most are open to anyone and anything entered

(a photograph, for example) can be seen by everyone in the room. Messages can therefore be copied and forwarded.

There are minimum ages for some Chat Rooms and Social Networking sites: Facebook is 13; Yahoo is 18 years, "Bebo" is 13 years and "Myspace" is 14 years but children can always lie about their age and identity.

**Facebook** has a panic button where 13-18 year olds can click CEOP to report concerns such as cyber-bullying or anything with a sexual or potentially harmful content. To install go to: <http://apps.facebook.com/clickceop/>  
*Game Smart*

Concerns about children and young people using games consoles and computers (off line) or accessing online role playing games have given rise to similar concerns to the use of the Internet.

Foster carers need to be aware of the nature and the age rating of the games being played and follow the Net Smart guidance for keeping the child safe if online gaming is being accessed. Ensure that the child is not playing games for older children at a friend's house or that a friend brings along an 18+ or adult games when they visit.

Young children should not play video or play station games meant for older children or adults. 18+ games have inappropriate levels of violence, bad language and sexual content.

**Ratings** can be confusing but there are two main classifications:

**BBFC symbols – (similar to the ones for films) e.g. "PG", "12" or "18"**

**PEGI symbols – (on games) "7+", "16+", "(\*!@)" – denoting bad language.**

Both classifications denote how old you have to be to play the game, **not** how skilful you have to be.

Many online games also have a report button, which can be used if a game opponent is being abusive.

Playing computer games can be an exciting and educational part of a young person's leisure time but as with all interests, it has to be carried out safely and with adult monitoring and supervision.

### **Response to an Incident**

If you are concerned or come across inappropriate or illegal content, inform a member of Children's Services or if out of hours, the Contact Centre or the Police.

### **Further advice and information**

Manchester Safeguarding Children's Board. For children and young people:  
[www.manchestercrb.org.uk/keeping-yourself-safe.asp](http://www.manchestercrb.org.uk/keeping-yourself-safe.asp)

[www.chatdanger.com](http://www.chatdanger.com) for all interactive technology.  
[www.cybermentors.org.uk](http://www.cybermentors.org.uk) for children and young people feeling bullied or in trouble on or offline.

Contact: [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents) - for advice and guidance to parents and carers on the safe use of the Internet for children provided by the UK Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP). Children and adults can also report any concerns to trained officers about illegal or inappropriate activity. Officers follow child protection guidelines and will forward reports to the Police or relevant local authority.

[www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk) - operate an Internet "hotline" for the public to report exposure to potentially illegal content Online.

For information on Social Networking and IT safety through the Children and Young People's section of the Fostering Network's online resource centre at [www.fostering.net/resources/subjectws/children-and-young-people](http://www.fostering.net/resources/subjectws/children-and-young-people)

National Children's Home's Net Smart Rules. Advice and guidance on Internet safety for children, parents and carers can be found on: [www.nch.org.uk/itok](http://www.nch.org.uk/itok).

Parental control software: [www.kids.getnetwise.org](http://www.kids.getnetwise.org)  
Get Safe Online: [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)