

**ROCHDALE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE SERVICES  
POLICY**

**SAFER CARING POLICY**

**1. WHAT IS A SAFER CARING POLICY?**

- 1.1 Each approved fostering household must have a Safer Caring Policy which is prepared by the Supervising Social Worker in conjunction with the foster carers. A family safer caring policy is completed as part of the assessment process, subsequent safer caring policies are completed when a child is placed which are made individual to each child.
- 1.2 The purpose of the policy is to raise the awareness of foster carers to the possibilities of abusive situations arising within the foster home and to set out the arrangements within the foster home for reducing such possibilities. Issues to be covered include showing affection, bathroom routines, dress, outings, bedrooms and bedtime, babysitters, travelling by car, photos/videos, education about sex and sexuality, what to tell others, discipline and rewards, eating/meal times, names, internet, mobiles, issues regarding birth parents and any other risks not identified.
- 1.3 The Safer Caring Policy will be reviewed and updated as appropriate by the Supervising Social Worker in conjunction with the foster carers. This will always happen at the point of a new placement with the foster carers to ensure that any particular issues in relation to the child or children being placed are addressed. It may also be necessary to amend the safer caring policy during a placement where specific issues of, say, behaviour management arise which require a change to the Placement Information Record/Placement Plan.
- 1.4 The reviewing and updating of the Safer Caring Policy is part of the support provided to the foster carer by the supervising social worker under the Fostering Service Procedure (FO1(a))

**2. SUPPORT FOR CARERS**

- 2.1 The supervising social worker will provide support, supervision and training to all approved foster carers. The Fostering Service Procedure (FO1(a)) sets out the regular support and supervision arrangements, and the Safer Caring Policy should set out any additional support which will be provided, if requested or as required, via the Supervising Social Worker.
- 2.2 A Risk Assessment will be completed by the child's social worker in conjunction with the supervising social worker for each new placement, identifying any risks to the placement and full information about the child to be placed will be provided by the child's Social Worker - see Obtaining a Foster placement (Matching Guidance) (FO3 (e))

### 3. HEALTH & SAFETY

- 3.1 A health and safety checklist will be completed as part of the assessment of all foster carers, including ensuring that the foster carers are clear that they must lock cupboards that store detergents and medicines, maintain a secure box for confidential documents, ensure that a child car seat or booster seat is fitted in the foster carer's car and ensure that any sharp knives or any other dangerous objects are out of harm's way.
- 3.2 A fire plan will be drawn up and any child in placement will be made aware of this plan, at an age appropriate level. The supervising social worker must also have a copy of the fire plan, the fire service are available to complete a fire safety check for foster carers offering them advice, support and guidance on the best escape route.
- 3.3 The health and safety check will be reviewed at the annual review, or earlier if the need arises - see Approval of Foster Carer's (FO3(e))
- 3.4 The batteries of the fire alarms should be checked at least monthly.
- 3.5 The foster carers must ensure that the home is kept warm, adequately furnished and decorated and is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. They should also continue to ensure sufficient space and facilities for play, doing homework and quiet space where the child in placement can be alone and have privacy.
- 3.6 They must also ensure that the electrical appliances and fittings are kept in good working order and are regularly checked. There should be no portable gas or paraffin heaters on the property. Household heating should be safe, appropriately calibrated and adequate to heat the home and be serviced regularly. All gas appliances should be serviced regularly, especially gas fires and gas boilers. The hot water supply should be appropriately calibrated or easily and safely usable for young people. Fire guards must be used to surround open/ electric/ gas/ solid fuel/ log burners/ stoves/ fires.
- 3.7 They must ensure the back garden is secure, with adequate fencing and a secure back gate.
- 3.8 Any changes to the property need to be mentioned to the supervising social worker in order to ascertain if a new risk assessment needs to be completed.
- 3.9 Consideration must also be given as to where in the house children may play unsupervised. The foster carers should ensure that the child in placement is kept within earshot and checked on when going quiet. Being left alone could result in risky or dangerous situations. Children should not normally be allowed to play with other children behind closed doors.
- 3.10 The foster carers should ensure the safety of the child in placement in relation to the family pets. All cats and dogs should be fully vaccinated, regularly treated for the prevention of fleas and worms as necessary or as recommended by the veterinarian. The Supervising Social Worker needs to be informed about any additions to the pets in the household, immediately and the Supervising Social Worker will carry out any pet risk assessments as necessary.

- 3.11 Safety helmets should always be worn if the children in the placements use bicycles and, if possible, outer garments should always have fluorescent strips to ensure visibility. All bicycles should be roadworthy and the lights, reflectors, and horns should be checked regularly.
- 3.12 All medicines, alcohol, intoxicating substances, dangerous liquids, chemicals, cigarettes and matches should be locked away or kept completely out of reach of the child in placement. Foster carers should inform the Supervising Social Worker immediately if they acquire guns, weapons or any dangerous item that would require an extra risk assessment.

#### **4. GENERAL HEALTH AND WELFARE**

- 4.1 The foster carer must ensure, in conjunction with the child's social worker, that the child in placement has an annual health assessment, dental check up and an optical check up, the latter if considered needed.
- 4.2 Should the child in placement arrive with medication, then an emergency appointment needs to be made at the GP to ascertain the dispensing of the medicines. All accidents, significant illnesses, medicines and changes or areas of concern should immediately be notified to the Child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker and accurate records maintained.
- 4.3 The foster carers should also be familiar with the Missing from Home Protocol (LO3(b)) which applies should the child in placement be missing from home.
- 4.4 The foster carers are aware of the need to ensure a healthy eating plan and be aware of the risks associated with overeating, unhealthy meals and eating disorders. The diet should meet the child's growing needs, their religious or cultural needs, and take into account what s/he enjoys eating. The child in placement should have access to food and drink or extra food and drink (not alcohol). The foster carers will confirm with the Child's Social Worker at the placement planning meeting that the child in placement is able to eat all foods and determine any allergies, likes and dislikes.
- 4.5 The foster carers should give guidance to the child in placement on how they may keep themselves safe in the home, and this should include an understanding of dangerous materials, electrical equipment and fire risks.
- 4.6 All children have the right to a smoke free environment. The foster carers will ensure that the child in placement is protected from smoking in the most appropriate way.
- 4.7 All children should be supervised whilst playing in the back garden or the local park. The child in placement should have suitable toys, which stimulates and develops the child's play and learning, suitable to the child's age, interests and needs. The foster carers should also help the child in placement to maintain positive relationships and interests and encourage them to develop new ones.
- 4.8 Sun block and a sunhat need to be applied and worn in warm weather. The foster carers should ensure that the child in placement has enough clothing for their needs and that the clothes are in good condition.

Should a child arrive with insufficient clothing, then this should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting.

- 4.9 The greater susceptibility of children in care to bullying or being targeted by a potential abuser will always be considered. The foster carers will ensure that they recognise, record and appropriately address instances of bullying relating to the child, in accordance with the applicable policy and procedures.
- 4.10 Discipline should be age appropriate, incident appropriate, positive, no corporal punishment (this includes smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment), no restraint and no withholding of food as punishment. Careful consideration is needed before the use of sending a child to their room as a sanction as for some children this will trigger memories of prior abuse. The use of behaviour modification tools, for example star charts, should only be used in a positive manner, stressing positive reinforcement. It is advised that another person is present, if at all possible, when disciplining a child in line with their safer caring policy.
- 4.11 The foster carers must record, in their logbooks, and report promptly any concerns, accidents or incidents to the Child's Social Worker and their Supervising Social Worker or Duty worker if unavailable.
- 4.12 The following significant events require immediate notification to the Supervising Social Worker:
- Any illness or accident suffered by the child.
  - Any outbreak in the foster home of any infectious disease.
  - Any allegation that the child has committed an offence.
  - Any use of physical restraint against the child.
  - The involvement or suspected involvement of sexual exploitation.
  - Any incident relating to the child necessitating calling the police to the foster home.
  - Any absence of the child from the placement without permission.
  - Any failure of the child to attend school.
  - Any incidents of bullying suffered by the child.
  - Any changes to the people being members of the household.
  - Any changes to the structure of the home, i.e. for example extensions.
- 4.13 The foster carers should contact their supervising social worker if they are in any doubt about a situation which could affect their ability to provide safer caring or put themselves at risk of allegations.
- 4.14 The foster carer's diary should be used to record any appointments.
- 4.15 The use of babysitters should be clarified with the Supervising Social Worker beforehand, preferably at the pre-placement meeting. Babysitters need to be over sixteen years of age. If this is a regular arrangement the adult concerned will have a CRB clearance.

- 4.16 The foster carers should ensure that their home continues to offer an environment that is supportive and encouraging of a child to grow and thrive and where their emotional and developmental needs are addressed.

## **5. IDENTIFIED CONCERNS REGARDING THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR**

- 5.1 The foster carers must be aware of the fact that they are not allowed to administer any form of corporal punishment or restraint to discipline a child.
- 5.2 The foster carers should inform the Child's Social Worker at an early stage of any incidents that they feel they are unable to cope with, in order for support measures to be identified for all concerned. A behaviour management plan should then be drawn up, in order to assist them in the best way to address difficult behaviour.

## **6. IDENTIFIED NEEDS OF THE CARER'S OWN CHILDREN**

- 6.1 It is important to acknowledge the needs of the foster carers' own children, to take their views into account and to ensure that they are also aware of the Safer Caring Policy and the importance of adhering to the policy

## **7. PHYSICAL CONTACT**

- 7.1 The foster carers must protect any child in the placement from any physical and emotional harm. Similarly they should be aware of situations that might place themselves, their own family or the child in the placement at risk in terms of physical contact. All members of the family must be aware of and adhere to acceptable behaviour in relationship to hugs, kisses and touches. It is safer to agree that no one in the household touches another person's body without that person's permission. Children should always be asked if they want a hug and they need to be taught that it is perfectly acceptable to say no.
- 7.2 Attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality need careful consideration. Tickling, wrestling games and pretend fighting should be avoided.
- 7.3 The foster carers must not force the child in placement to kiss people as a greeting, if s/he is reluctant to do so.
- 7.4 Bedroom doors should be left open when appropriate (for example when playing), and closed, when appropriate (for example, when dressing). The child in placement should never be allowed to be in the same bed as the foster carers.
- 7.5 All members of the family should be dressed appropriately, for example not walk around without dressing gowns and always be fully clothed. The child in the placement should be encouraged to manage his or her own personal hygiene, age appropriately. The bathroom door should be shut whilst someone is using the toilet/bathroom.
- 7.6 Sexual education must be age appropriate and sensitive to the views and beliefs of the child's family, whilst ensuring the child's access to appropriate advice and guidance.

- 7.7 Most families have words and terms they use to describe parts of the body or bodily functions, such as going to the toilet. The foster carers need to consider the words they use and their potential meaning for foster children. They also need to establish the terms the child in placement uses, as soon as possible, to avoid any distress to them, who might be finding it difficult to express their needs.
- 7.8 The foster carers must protect the child in placement against any harm that might arise from contact with visitors or strangers.
- 7.9 Decisions around overnight stays are based around the needs of individual children and should be discussed at the placement planning meeting. Where appropriate the child's Placement Information Record/Placement Plan provides for the carers to agree an overnight stay without having to discuss arrangements with the Child's Social Worker prior to overnight stays.

## **8. PERSONAL SPACE**

- 8.1 The foster carers must respect and understand the need for each individual, in relation to their age, to have the right to personal space. All children have the right to their own personal space. This should be adhered to, taking the child in placement's age into account. Privacy, i.e. time and space, should be respected and all members should be encouraged to knock on bedroom doors before entering. In no circumstance should an adult get into a child's bed.
- 8.2 Consideration needs to be given as to when others may enter the child's bedroom. Except in an emergency, people are expected to ask the child's permission before entering the room and older children should be given increasing control over who goes into their room.
- 8.3 The child in placement should have somewhere to keep her belongings safe. Any belongings of the child that they are currently not using should be kept for him or her in a secure place, as this might be the only memories the child has of his/her time with the birth family. The same is true of articles of clothing.
- 8.4 Should the child in placement arrive with his or her belongings packed in an inappropriate container, for example a bin bag, then this information should immediately be notified to the Supervising Social Worker who will in turn notify the child's Social Worker Team Manager and the Fostering Team Manager.

## **9. TRANSPORT**

- 9.1 The foster carers must ensure that any vehicle they use has an up to date MOT, and that appropriate taxes and insurance are in place. Foster carers must ensure that they have a valid driving licence. All documents are to be seen as part of a Foster Carer assessment and at their annual review.
- 9.2 The child in placement should not be left unsupervised in the vehicle. The child should always, whilst travelling in the car, be seated appropriately in the car with age appropriate car seats. The foster carers should not exceed the number of passengers allowed - i.e. a normal family car would take two people in the front and three passengers in the back.

- 9.3 The child in placement should not be transported by anyone that has not been specifically approved by the child's social worker, such as taxis, other carers or members of the family, etc.

## 10. CONSENT

- 10.1 Foster carers must understand that they always need the permission of the person with Parental Responsibility for medical treatment. The medical consent within the Placement Information Record allows carers to seek medical treatment **but not to sign for it to take place**, as foster carers do not have parental responsibility.
- 10.2 So far as the parents' consent is concerned, this will usually be provided within the Placement Information Record/Placement Plan. So far as the Local Authority is concerned, the child's social worker should be contacted so that the necessary consent can be provided. In an emergency, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) needs to be contacted by the foster carer. All foster carers will have the contact telephone number of the EDT.
- 10.3 Foster carers must be made aware that they are not allowed to take the child in placement out of the jurisdiction of the UK, without the prior necessary consent from the Local Authority, which needs to be received in writing.
- 10.4 Photos should not be taken if the child in placement is in the bath, on the toilet or in a state of undress. When taking general photographs or videoing, permission should be sought from the child and her parents, as well as the child's Social Worker.
- 10.5 Agreement around who can give consent for any changes to the appearance of the child in placement, for example hair cuts or piercings for older children must be discussed and agreed at the placement planning meeting/ reviewed when the Child's care plan is updated.
- 10.6 For school trips there is a presumption that children who are looked after will go on relevant educational visits. Foster carers can give consent for visits which have been authorised by the school, provided the visit is within the United Kingdom, that the person with Parental Responsibility has not refused consent for the child to undertake such activities and that the activity is not against the child's risk assessment. Foster carers are encouraged to discuss such visits with the child's Social Worker before giving consent and if the foster carer does not wish to take responsibility for authorising an educational visit the child's social worker will obtain consent from the relevant manager.

## 11. CONTACT

- 11.1 Contact with birth families and others who are significant to the child in placement is of major importance to children who are looked after. The foster carers, in conjunction with the Social Worker, will be expected to devise strategies to promote contact and manage it in a way that ensures the safety of the child.

## **12. RACE, CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION**

- 12.1 The needs of the child in placement arising from race, culture, language and religion, need careful consideration. This refers also to the identity, physical and dietary needs of the individual. The child should be in an environment where his or her racial, ethnic, cultural and religious and sexual identity is nurtured and s/he is helped to value and enhance this.
- 12.2 Some carers may say grace at mealtimes or pray as a family at other times. This may be of a positive benefit to a child who shares the same religion, but potentially damaging to a child who has experienced ritualistic abuse.

## **13. PERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES**

- 13.1 Use of mobile phones, internet, television, console games, books, magazines, movies and media should be carefully monitored, screened and supervised. Filters and high security settings on the internet should be used, to limit the access to inappropriate sites. There should be no pornographic material on the premises and books, CD's, video's, etc. that are considered educational, but contain information of a sexual nature, should have their use supervised.
- 13.2 The pursuit of dangerous activities is discouraged and permission should be sought from the child's Social Worker beforehand. Any sport that could pose any potential danger should be accompanied by a risk assessment. This should especially be remembered during day trips or holidays.
- 13.3 The foster carers should avoid the use of the terms "mummy" and "daddy". They are not the child's birth parents and the use of these terms is likely to confuse the child and can also antagonise or alienate parents or birth family. The use of first names is the preferred option.
- 13.4 The foster carers should be made aware of the fact that should the child in placement ever need to be interviewed by the police, they should immediately contact the child's Social Worker. If suspected of criminal activity, they should also not be acting as the appropriate adult for the child in placement, when interviewed by the police. In such a case, they should also remember that the child in placement should not be interviewed without legal representation.

## **14. PREPARING FOR A PLACEMENT**

- 14.1 The foster carers will need to prepare their household afresh in advance of each individual placement.
- 14.2 Some of the issues they need to consider are:
- How will they explain to the child in placement what is expected of his or her?
  - Do they have all the information they need to care for the child safely?
  - Is the child known to have been abused?
  - Do the particular needs of the child mean that the usual guidelines and rules of the household need to be revised?
  - If so, is this achievable and acceptable to all members of the household?

- What are the most important household rules that must be adhered to, and which are less significant?
- How will unacceptable behaviour be dealt with, whoever displays it?

All answers to these questions will be discussed at the placement planning meeting and support, if necessary, identified.

## 15. ANY OTHER INFORMATION

- 15.1 The foster carers must encourage openness between themselves and the child in placement by talking about things and being ready to listen.
- 15.2 All confidential documents should be safely locked away in a secure box and at the end of a placement all documents relating to the child must be handed back to the child's Social Worker
- 15.3 While many of the elements of the carers' Safer Caring Policy are about the child and therefore relevant at all times, some relate to the environment in which the household is at a particular time. This is usually the family home, but they will also apply to other environments where the foster family are, e.g. where they stay in holiday accommodation or use a caravan.
- 15.4 Compliance with the Safer Caring Policy will apply to all members of the foster carers' household and the family's support network.
- 15.5 Where an allegation or complaint is made about the foster carer or a member of the household, see the **Allegations of abuse made against Foster Carers Procedure**. (FO3(b))