



SCF IFA Unannounced Visit Policy and Template

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Policy Summary:

This policy aims to provide guidance around Unannounced Visits for foster carers and SCF IFA staff.

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Background

Unannounced visits are a requirement regulation and guidance in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The requirement is set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) in England.

“Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year ...”

Though, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require Fostering Service Providers to make "at least one unannounced visit" to a foster carer's home, each year (NMS 2011, 21.8). Slough Children First Independent Fostering Agency policy is to have a minimum of two unannounced visits per year. This is done at a six-monthly interval. If at any time Slough Children First Independent Fostering Agency believe it is necessary to increase the number of unannounced visits, it has the power to do this and may or may not advise the Foster Carers about the increase, especially where there are safeguarding concerns. The expectation is that the entire accommodation (including the foster carers bedrooms, outdoor buildings and garden space) will be inspected at each unannounced visit. In other words, all rooms in the property must be viewed.

If the Supervising Social Worker visits with the aim of an unannounced visit and does not get an answer, e.g. believes the foster carer is not home, a note should be left, and the attempted visit should be clearly recorded. It may be necessary to carry out the unannounced visit in the evening or on Saturdays. Unannounced visits should take place whether or not a foster carer has a child or young person in placement.

The policy provides general guidance on unannounced visits and bedroom checks. If you have specific concerns as a result of the unannounced visit and/or bedroom check, please speak directly with your line manager.

Please read:

- Slough Children First Independent Fostering Agency – Accommodation Guidance
- Bedroom Sharing Risk Assessment and Template
- Health and Safety Assessment

The Purpose of Unannounced Visits

Unannounced visits are a way of ensuring that foster carers are providing appropriate care and safety to looked after children. Foster carers should be made aware from the beginning of their fostering career that unannounced visits are a requirement, and they must co-operate with the social worker to ensure that this care standard is met.

Unannounced visits must take place for reasons of child protection and quality of care. To assess whether the carer:

- Leaves the child alone.
- Leaves the child in the care of someone else.
- The child is sleeping in the room the carer has stated.
- Is someone else staying in the home (who has not had a DBS check and who the Agency was not aware of)
- Considers health and safety matters in the home.
- Have numerous other people visiting the home.
- Smokes in presence of the child or know other people do (please refer to Smoking Policy)
- Engages in age-appropriate activities with the child.
- Has appropriate equipment, books, and toys available.
- Has food in the fridge/cupboards.
- General cleanliness of the home.
- Which members of the family are supervising the children.
- What activities or play/leisure/social opportunities are going on, or available to the children and young people in placement
- Is the Safer Caring Policy/Plan being complied with? Are there issues to do with safer caring practice that are apparent?

Any issues arising from the unannounced visit should be addressed at the time of the visit and reinforced at the next supervision session. Depending on the circumstances further unannounced visits may be deemed necessary. Should any social worker fail to address a safeguarding concern this will be considered as a potential disciplinary matter. Conversely, should a foster carer fail to disclose a safeguarding concern, this might lead to an allegation or standards of care investigation.

The Supervising Social Worker should view the house and outside play area ensuring cleanliness and health and safety compliance. The Supervising Social Worker should ask (and seek the child/young person's permission) to see their bedroom. A check should be made to ensure adequate play and activity materials, study areas and materials, bedding and furniture, clothing and footwear.

The child/young person placed should be seen alone and the discussion with the child/young person should be captured in your recording of the visit. Discussion could cover education, leisure activities, meals, bedtime, boundaries and sanctions, concerns, complaints, and suggestions for improvement. Every attempt should be made to see the child/young person as part of the Unannounced Visit, where this has not been achieved, please discuss with your Line Manager.

Frequency of Unannounced Visits

An unannounced visit should be made to a newly approved foster carer within the first six months of approval. The unannounced visit should be shown as a separate visit to the monthly supervision visit; this is because the two visits are separate with different objectives. The Agency should carry out two unannounced visits per year, usually every 6 months. A further visit may be linked to the carer's individual circumstances i.e. Following a complaint or an allegation or if assessed as needed.

Recording

Complete the Unannounced Visit template as fully as possible. Additionally, you will want to add to your recording where appropriate e.g. the decision, interactions and observations of the child and specifically views of a child. It is important that you seek out opportunity to obtain the views of the looked after child on the placement, education, health etc. and that you record the view on the section of the database designed specifically for this purpose.

The completed Unannounced Visit template must be attached to foster carer's recordings. Where the child has been seen it should be cross-referenced on the Child's recordings. The Bedroom Check must be logged on the child's recording, unless there is no child in placement, in which case they are logged on the carer record. Where the child and the foster carer are not seen, the attempt should be recorded in both respective records and the plan for the next attempted visit.

UNANNOUNCED VISIT TEMPLATE

Unannounced Visit

Supervising Workers Record of Visit to Foster Carers

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

Standard 10.5 - The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011

People Present at today's visit
Name and Relationship

Child or young person looked after seen and spoken to:
Yes/No

Record of Supervision Visit

Have diary records been seen, where are they stored and are the diary records up to date and signed by

SSW?

E.g.

Confidentiality or records.

Does the foster home 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. (NMS - Standard 10.1)

E.g. Sufficient play and homework space and child friendly.

Is the foster home warm, adequately furnished and decorated, maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and in good order throughout. (NMS - Standard 10.2)

E.g. toys in good order, not cluttered, evidence of non-smoking in the household.

Are outdoor spaces which are part of the premises safe, secure and well maintained. (NMS - Standard 10.2)

E.g. If the foster carer has pets in the garden clear, are ponds and pools sufficiently covered / inaccessible

Are health and safety guidelines being followed and avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home. (NMS 0 Standard 10.3)

E.g. smoke detectors in good working order, fire safety plan evident, good level of supervision with a computer, any household items in need of repair.

Foster Child's bedroom (including foster carers bedroom if child in their room) 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 agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. (NMS - Standard 10.6) E.g., is there enough space for child belongings, is the room and bedding clean and appropriate and in good condition. Does the child's bedroom reflect the same standard as the rest of the house.

General comments regarding foster carers lifestyle and care provided. E.g. Evidence of adequate supervision of children or young people in the household and evidence of a healthy lifestyle including diet and exercise being promoted.

Foster carers comments.

What needs to happen next, timescale for completion and by whom:

Goal / Plan / Safety Planning ----- Timescales ----- By Whom

Signatures – This will be via the Charms electronic signature.