

Slough Children First (SCF) Independent Fostering Agency

Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy



Introduction

This policy has been produced to outline to children/young people, parents, foster carers and social workers, Slough Children First (SCF) policy on acceptable forms of control and sanctions for use in foster homes.

It is unreasonable to expect children/young people not to misbehave from time to time. Whether it is toddlers exhibiting temper tantrums or direct challenges to a carer's authority by an adolescent, there will always be times when carers need to employ the use of control and discipline.

Good order is also a necessary aspect of family life to enable children/young people to develop in a safe and secure environment.

This policy seeks to provide all involved with a framework within which this necessary order can be maintained, children and young people are provided with appropriate development opportunities, while protecting children/young people and carers alike.

No two children/young people or carers are identical and, in applying this policy carers will need to be mindful of the individual needs of specific children/young people. They will also need to be aware that avoiding confrontation and rewarding good behaviour rather than punishing bad are often the most successful techniques available.

Statutory framework

Fostering services are required by regulation 13 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 to prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children/young people placed with foster parents. The service must take all reasonable steps to ensure that:

- a) ***No form of corporal punishment is used on any child placed with the foster parent.***
- b) ***No child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable.***
- c) ***Physical restraint should not be used as a sanction.***

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Regulation 27 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 requires that the fostering service enter into a written agreement with all approved carers (The Foster Care Agreement) covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 of the regulations. These include the requirement ***‘Not to administer corporal punishment to any child/young person placed with them’***.

The Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services restates that ***“no form of corporal punishment should be used and that no foster child should be subject to any excessive or unreasonable measure of control or discipline”***.

National Minimum Standard 3 reinforces the message that foster care should provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour. This includes ensuring that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available about a child’s circumstances, to help them understand and predict the child’s needs and behaviours.

Standard 3 also requires that fostering services provide training for foster carers in positive care and control of children, including de-escalating problems and disputes.

The remainder of this document sets out Slough Children’s Services Trust IFA policy on acceptable measures of control and discipline of children and young people placed with foster parents as required by regulations 13 and 27.

Policy

- No form of corporal punishment will be used on any child/young person placed with a foster carer
- No child/young person placed with foster carers will be subject to any measure of control or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable and
- Physical restraint is not used on a child/young person.

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment includes smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. This list is indicative rather than exhaustive and other forms of control may also be viewed as corporal punishment.

Relationships between carers and children/young people should be based on mutual respect and understanding and clear professional and personal boundaries should be in place, which are effective for both.

Carers should set and maintain safe, consistent, realistic and understandable boundaries for children and young people in relation to acceptable behaviour.

Expectations of behaviour for both carers and children/young people should be clearly understood and negotiated by those living in the foster home, including exercising

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appropriate control over children and young people in the interests of their own welfare and the protection of others.

In day-to-day decision making, carers should demonstrate an appropriate balance between:

- each member of the households wishes and preferences
- the needs of individual children/young people
- the needs of the group of children and young people living in the household at the time
- the protection of others (including the public) from harm

All children/young people in the home must be looked after in a way that treats them fairly and according to their needs.

Where children/young people require personal care, their choices of which carer (where more than one) provides that care should be maximised, within safer care guidelines.

Carers should respond positively to acceptable behaviour, and where the behaviour of children/young people is regarded as unacceptable, it should be responded to by constructive, acceptable and known disciplinary measures in line with this policy.

Measures of control and discipline must be based on establishing positive relationships with children/young people which are designed to help the child/young person.

Such measures must be fair and consistently applied. They should also encourage reparation and restitution and reduce the likelihood of negative behaviour becoming the focus of attention and subsequent disruption to the placement.

Carers should make clear to children/young people the consequences of unacceptable behaviour and any measures applied should be relevant to the incident, reasonable and carried out as quickly as possible.

Any measures taken to respond to unacceptable behaviour must be appropriate to the age, understanding and individual needs of the child/young person, for example taking into account that unacceptable or challenging behaviour may be the result of illness, bullying, certain disabilities such as autism, or communication difficulties.

Sanctions must not be excessive or unreasonable.

Children/young people should be assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive adult response to inappropriate behaviour.

Children/young people should be encouraged to develop a proper awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Carers and children/young people alike must be clear that each individual has rights and responsibilities in relation to those who live in the home and people in the community.

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When disciplinary measures are used, children/young people should be encouraged to write or have their views recorded and sign their names against them if possible in the records kept by the carer.

Slough Children First IFA and the child's social worker will also need to be informed, as soon after the incident as possible. Carers will need to fully record the incident (see section on recording in this document).

Unacceptable Forms of Discipline and Control

In addition to the restriction on corporal punishment, none of the following should be used as a form of control or discipline in foster homes:

- any punishment relating to the consumption or deprivation of food or drink
- any restriction, other than one imposed by court on -
 - (i) a child/young person's contact with his parents, relatives or friends;
 - (ii) visits to him by his parents, relatives or friends;

a child/young person's communications with any of the following persons:

- (a) any solicitor or other adviser or advocate acting for the child/young person;
 - (b) any officer of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service appointed for him/her;
 - (c) any social worker for the time being assigned to the child/young person by his/her placing authority;
 - (d) any person appointed in respect of any requirement of the procedure specified in the Representations procedure (Children) Regulations 1991;
 - (e) any person appointed as a visitor for him/her in accordance with paragraph 17 of Schedule 2 to the 1989 Act;
 - (f) any person authorised by Ofsted;
 - (g) any person authorised by the local authority in whose area the foster home is situated;
- his/her access to any telephone helpline providing counselling for children/young people
 - any requirement that a child/young person wear distinctive or inappropriate clothes
 - the use or withholding of medication or medical or dental treatment
 - the intentional deprivation of sleep
 - the imposition of any financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum (which may be by instalments) by way of reparation
 - any intimate physical examination of the child/young person
 - the withholding of any aids or equipment needed by a disabled child/young person
 - any measure which involves any child/young person in the imposition of any measure against any other child/young person or the punishment of a group of children for the behaviour of an individual child/young person.
 - the threat of removal from a placement.

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Nothing in the foregoing should restrict the taking of any action by, or in accordance with the instructions of, a registered medical practitioner or a registered dental practitioner which is necessary to protect the health of a child/young person, or the taking of any action immediately necessary to prevent injury to any person.

Contact may be restricted if this is in the best interests of the child/young person, but such restrictions can only be imposed by a court or in certain circumstances by a social worker. Carers must not unilaterally take a decision to restrict contact unless there is clear and compelling evidence that the child/young person is in immediate danger, when the carer may exercise their inherent duty of care to protect the child/young person.

Suggested strategies

Where inappropriate behaviour is attention seeking, the foster carer might consider not responding, but showing positive responses at times when the behaviour is positive and more contained.

The foster carer may be able to divert a child or young person by skilfully using:

- Humour
- Subject change
- Activity
- Reverse psychology

When a child or young person is displaying verbal abusive language and becoming physically aggressive, if possible, they should be guided to a safe place, if not small children and any audience should be removed.

Acceptable Forms of Discipline and Control

Individual carers will need to discuss with their supervising social workers the forms of control and discipline to be used within their home. These will vary from carer to carer and sometimes from placement to placement.

Factors that need to be taken into account include:

- the usual forms of control and discipline used with the carer's own children
- the carer's experience of what works well for them
- the carer's own experience of control and discipline as a child
- the age and ability of children/young people to be placed
- the foster child's history, including any experience of abuse
- any needs of foster children/young people arising from a disability
- religious and cultural issues

The following list provides guidance on the forms of control and discipline that are generally acceptable in foster homes. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, nor is it meant to imply that all these methods are appropriate and acceptable in all circumstances. Carers should think carefully before employing any of these methods and if necessary, seek further advice.

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Withdrawal of Privileges

Privileges may be withdrawn for unacceptable behaviour. This may include denial of recreational facilities but should not normally include denial of attendance at a regular out of school activity such as swimming lessons or attendance at cubs or brownies. Looked after children/young people are often less skilled than their peers or socially isolated and the use of such a sanction may further disadvantage the child.

Grounding

A child/young person can be denied permission to leave the house for a set period of time or in specific circumstances. As with withdrawing privileges, the carer may still need to ensure that the child/young person is allowed to attend specific activities.

Reparation

This involves the child doing something to put right the wrong they have done, e.g. repairing damage or returning stolen property.

Early Bedtime

An early bedtime can be used positively in order for the child/young person to reflect upon their behaviour. This should be no more than 1 hour before their regular bedtime.

Time Out/Isolation

This should be used to affect positive change. It should be used as an opportunity to restore order in the child/young person and home and to enable the child/young person to reflect upon their behaviour.

This sanction can range from isolating the child/young person within a room occupied by others to sending them to a room on their own. Care must however be taken to ensure the child/young person's safety and carers will need to think through the potential impact of the child/young person's previous experiences before taking this action. For example, a child/young person who had been regularly abused in a living room should not be isolated in the carer's living room.

Denial of Personal Belongings

Children and young people have a right to their own clothes, toiletries and other possessions. However, personal belongings may be removed if they are deemed to be harmful to the child/young person or others or they are being misused and likely to be damaged.

Carers may also restrict access to the use of personal possessions, for example a Play station or iPod, as a sanction for a specified period.

Comfort items such as a favourite doll or bear, should never be removed from a child as a sanction.

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Restricting Mobility/Locking Doors

Subject to the usual security measures of the household such as locking external doors at night, children/young people should never be locked in a room.

It may be appropriate to deny a child/young person access to a particular room or a specific area such as the garden. This may be achieved in a number of ways such as verbal requests, locking doors or standing in the way, while taking care to avoid the risk of physical confrontation.

The Use of Physical Restraint

Carers should not use physical restraint as a sanction, if a child is putting themselves or others at risk of harm, it may be necessary to restrain them, e.g. if a child tried to run out into the road in front of traffic.

In the event of using a physical intervention foster carers should

- Immediately contact their supervising social worker.
- Complete a serious incident form within 24 hours

The incidents of the use of restraints and the details of those restraints will be monitored, and training offered, and the policy and procedures are adopted appropriately.

Recording

All incidents must be recorded as detailed.

- What lead to the incident in terms of possible “triggers” for the child?
- Full record of the incident.
- Did the child/young person’s view the action taken as fair and appropriate?
- Was the action taken discussed with and/or witnessed by others?
- Was the action taken agreed by the child’s social worker and/or birth parents?
- Could any other party misconstrue the action taken or view it as inappropriate?

If the carer is in any doubt about whether any action taken should be recorded or not, then this is probably an indication that it should. In such circumstances the carer should record the incident and bring it to the attention of the child’s social worker and the agency at the earliest possible opportunity. Sanctions must be recorded in an incident log and added to the digital recording system CHARMS, using the progress item ‘Monitoring Event – Use of restraint, control or discipline’. Any such reports need to be sent to the team manager.

Complaints and Allegations

Carers should consider the potential risk of a complaint being made before the use of any form of control or discipline.

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All carers will be aware of the risk of unfounded allegations being made against them. However experienced or well known to the agency the carer is, all are vulnerable in this regard and the agency has a duty to investigate any complaint or representation made by or on behalf of a child/young person.

Such complaints and representations will be dealt with in accordance with the SCF complaints procedure and if necessary, child protection procedures may also need to be followed.

Safer Caring Guidelines

All carers are required to produce safe caring guidelines for their home, and these must be approved by every placing social worker and explained to the foster child.

Assessing and supervising social workers must consider with applicants and approved carers the implications arising for these from the carer's views on methods of control and discipline to be used in the foster home. These should be detailed in the safe caring guidelines, shared with the child before the placement commences and referred to in the placement agreement.

Fostering services are required to ensure that foster carer's training covers managing behaviour.

Supervising social workers should ensure that they pay attention to the training needs of carers and other members of their household, addressing these in the appraisal of training and development needs which must be documented in the annual review report.

Social workers should encourage carers to make use of any available training opportunities provided by the agency.

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