

Southampton City Council

FOSTERING - SAFER CARING POLICY

**Fostering
Southampton**

Making a difference



Southampton City Council

Safer Caring Policy 2023 to 2026

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Safer Caring Policy 2023			
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Purpose

Foster carers and the fostering service need to consider strategies that will help ensure the home is a safe place at all times. This means 'safe' for any foster child, for carers' own children, for foster carers themselves, other members of their family network and other people who share the foster carers' lives.

Safer caring is the means by which foster carers can ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people. Because the business of foster caring happens in the home of the carer, safer caring also aims to protect the wellbeing of carers and their families. It covers a broad range of themes, such as forming healthy attachments, dealing with difficult behaviour appropriately, ensuring the protection of each member of the household and minimising the risk of allegations made against carers.

The main purpose of this policy is to:

- To keep children in the foster home safe from abuse from adults
- To keep children in the foster home safe from abuse from other children
- To keep children safe from accessing inappropriate material via print, TV, video or online
- To minimise the risk from false allegations

Scope

This policy covers all foster carers, including connected persons foster carers (formerly known in Southampton as Friends & Family Carers), approved by Southampton City Council Fostering Service.

In addition, some elements of this policy are relevant for those connected persons foster carers who are temporarily approved as foster carers under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and some elements relate to those temporarily approved under Regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations

2010 in relation to Fostering for Adoption placements – see also Fostering for Adoption Policy (Adopt South).

Definitions and Legislation

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011

[The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

and the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

[Fostering services: national minimum standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Specifically, Standard 4 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards – Safeguarding Children, states:

Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse and accident.

Furthermore:

- Children’s safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation).
- Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children.
- Foster carers make positive relationships with children, generate a culture of openness and trust and are aware of and alert to any signs or symptoms that might indicate a child is at risk of harm.
- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media.
- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment
- Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-caring practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused. For foster carers who offer placements to disabled children, this includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children.
- The fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection, e.g. the responsible authority, schools, hospitals, general practitioners, etc., and does not work in isolation from them.

Statement

The Fostering Services Regulations (2011) require fostering agencies to prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with foster carers from abuse or neglect.

There are a number of essential safeguards that should be observed in all settings in which children live away from home, including foster care.

These safeguards should ensure that:

- Children feel valued and respected and their self-esteem is promoted
- There is an openness to the external world and external scrutiny, including contact with families and the wider community
- Staff and foster carers are trained in all aspects of safeguarding children
- Staff and foster carers are alert to children's vulnerability and risks of harm, and are knowledgeable about how to implement safeguarding children procedures
- Children who live away from home are listened to and their views and concerns responded to
- Children have ready access to a trusted adult, e.g. a family member, the child's social worker, Independent Visitor, children's advocate
- Children should be made aware of the help they could receive from independent advocacy services, external mentors, and Childline
- Staff recognise the importance of ascertaining the wishes and feelings of children and understand how individual children communicate by verbal or non-verbal means
- There are clear procedures for referring safeguarding concerns about a child to the relevant local authority
- There are clear and effective allegations and complaints procedures which are readily accessible to staff, children, and young people.
- Bullying is effectively countered and considered within the household and children's individual safer caring plans
- Recruitment and assessment procedures are rigorous and create a high threshold of entry to deter abusers
- There is effective supervision and support for foster carers
- Clear procedures and support systems are in place for dealing with allegations and expressions of concern by staff and carers about other staff or carers
- There is respect for diversity and sensitivity to race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality and disability

- Staff and carers are alert to the risks of harm to children in the external environment from people prepared to exploit the additional vulnerability of children living away from home

It is important that children in foster homes have a voice outside the family. Social workers are required to see children on their own (taking appropriate account of the child's wishes and feelings), and evidence of this should be recorded. Dependent on their circumstances, children may have an Independent Visitor who will advocate on their behalf.

Please refer to [Southampton Children's Services Procedures Manual \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com) for more information, procedures and guidance.

Safer Caring Plans

There are two types of Safer Caring Plans:

- 1) Family (or Household) Safer Caring Plan
- 2) Children's Safer Caring

Family (or Household) Safer Caring Plans

Foster carers need to consider strategies that will help ensure their home is always a safe place. The purpose of a Family Safer Caring Plan is to enable members of the household to consider what areas of their home and their lifestyle may include risk and working out what they can do so that safe care becomes a part of everyday life. It is not about changing everything you do but thinking about what changes could and should be made to make a foster child feel safe and secure.

All households differ from one another and operate with both formal and informal routines. At times these will be explicit and known but can also be implicit and unspoken. It is important that foster carers and their wider family know the guidelines that operate within the household and the strategies they employ to keep everyone safe.

The steps which foster carers need to take in order to provide safe care for children will, in themselves, provide better protection for foster carers against allegations and complaints.

Foster carers need to be aware of their own family arrangements (rules) for day to day living. These vary from family to family and are often unspoken and unwritten. Children within the family learn how these operate as part of their day-to-day development, and generally accept this as the norm. Foster carers need to consider these arrangements in respect of foster children, for three reasons:

1. It is important to consider the impact of the way a family functions on any child or young person joining the household. Adjustments are likely to be needed, and carers should think about ways of minimizing disruptions to the family routines.
2. Foster carers need to consider the implications of existing family rules for children and young people joining the household. These children will have had other

experiences of family life, which may have been very different. Some children may have come from chaotic backgrounds where there are few boundaries, and adjustment to a more formal structure may be difficult for them. Alternatively, some children and young people may have experienced a very rigid home life with a limited sense of control and may experience new freedoms in foster care which can also be challenging and problematic.

3. Foster carers will need to identify behaviour and practices within their own household that are acceptable to them but might increase the risks when fostering a child. Some perfectly acceptable routines in families could put both foster children and foster carers at risk, such as allowing children to get into bed with you for comfort would not be acceptable with foster children.

Each foster family should:

- Consider its own values and assumptions.
- Think about the implications that a child's trauma might have for caring for that child.
- Consider the risks posed by fostering for each member of the family, particularly the foster carers' own children.
- Use foster care as a way of developing positive identity. Breaking down stereotypes and shaping behaviour.
- Consider the risks for all posed by mobile phones, the internet, social media etc...
- Think about the role of good record keeping.
- Prepare for children being placed.

A Family Safer Caring Plan is usually drawn up during the assessment process, with the support and guidance of the assessing social worker. All members of the household should be involved in this exercise, including any children who live in the household or who may visit regularly. A Family Safer Caring Plan will also be covered in the Skills To Foster Training.

A copy of the Family Safer Caring Plan should be kept on file and be taken into consideration when matching the foster family with a child or young person.

In order for the Family Safer Caring Plan to be a meaningful document, there will be a need for it to be reviewed regularly, especially when there is a change to the composition of the household or significant changes to lifestyle. A Family Safer Caring Plan will also need to be reviewed when fostering families go on holiday or move to a new house.

It is important that the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) ensures that all members of the household have agreed and understood the implications of the plan. The social worker for any child placed with the foster family should be informed when the Family Safer Caring Plan is updated.

A copy of the Family Safer Caring Plan should be available for the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer as part of the Foster Care Review process.

Children's Safer Caring Plans and Risk Management Plans

All children and young people who live with foster families will have their own needs and will have experienced their own trauma. This is likely to have implications in terms of how they need to be cared for to ensure their safety. This could include specific risks around their health, frequently going missing, sexual or criminal exploitation or risks posed by members of their birth family.

An individual, child specific plan needs to be completed jointly by the child's social worker and the SSW along with the foster carers. This should be done no later than the placement agreement meeting and ideally before placement if possible. Consideration should be given to the age and understanding of the child in communicating the plan in a way which is understandable and respectful to the child. Each child must have a separate plan in their own name, including separate plans for each sibling placed together.

Some children and young people may have an additional risk management plan if specific, high risks issues have been identified and other monitoring agencies are involved e.g. the police or the Youth Offending Service.

It is likely that the Child Safer Caring Plan will need to be amended as the placement progresses and should form part of the child's Care Plan Review or any care planning meeting.

Safer Caring and the Assessment, Approval and Training of Foster Carers

Standard 10 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards states:

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.

Standard 13 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards states:

The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.

Health and Safety in the home

During the assessment process the assessing social worker must complete a health and safety questionnaire with the applicants. If the applicants have dogs or other animals an assessment / questionnaire on them must also be completed. These documents must be presented at foster panel with the Form F.

The health and safety questionnaire covers the main issues included in National Minimum Standards and must be completed annually at the foster carers' formal review meeting. This will ensure ongoing compliance, identify any risks within the home, and allow for a plan on how to minimise those risks. This should also highlight any equipment that is needed to protect children in the foster home. The dog and pet questionnaire should be updated if and when there are changes to the pet ownership in the home. The health and safety questionnaire also covers vehicles owned and used by the foster family.

The supervising social worker should advise the foster carers to inform them if any building work is planned to take place in the house or garden, and to consider the implications for any child in placement or any child likely to be placed.

Checks and References in assessment

As part of the assessment process the Assessment Team social worker will undertake Disclosure and Barring Service Checks on all adults in the home, and other adults who are likely to have significant unsupervised contact with the child. Other references will also be sought.

During the assessment and training process of prospective carers, the assessing social workers and trainers should give the applicants information on the type of abuse children suffer, the possible consequences for them and the people who care for them. The assessing social worker should encourage the applicants to think about safe care for a child and themselves, and with the support of the social worker should start to write a Safer Caring Policy for their home.

Safer Caring Training

Standard 20.9 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards states:

Appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding, and ensures that foster carers understand how safer caring principles should be applied in a way which meets the needs of individual children.

The fundamental aspects of safer caring are included in the Skills To Foster training programme that all prospective foster carers complete as part of the assessment and approval process.

After this, all approved foster carers are expected to undertake further, specific Safer Caring training within the first year following their approval and this should be renewed at least every three years thereafter.

This training will be offered to any other adult or young person aged 16 years+, who is involved in the fostering task. Young people in the household or involved in the fostering task under the age of 16 can attend this training by prior arrangement with the trainer.

Additional Specific Guidance

The names you use

Southampton Fostering suggest that the preferred option is for children in foster care to call their foster carers by their first names. Children should be discouraged from calling their foster carers 'mummy' or 'daddy', as this does not reflect the relationship between the child and the adults and may cause confusion about the child's own birth family identity.

On occasions this it may be permitted for children to call their foster carers 'mummy' or 'daddy' if it is requested or instigated by the child and the child is formally matched and placed long term. This would require agreement from the child's social worker and be considered alongside any life story work or identity work happening.

Physical Contact and Showing Affection

This is often a very difficult area for foster carers. There can be a dilemma between how to provide a sense of normality for a child whilst ensuring safety for everyone. In addition, families will have differing ways of showing affection and the way in which adults respond to their birth children may not be appropriate for looked after children – foster carers need to adapt to the needs of the child and not expect the child to fit in with family norms. It is important, however, that foster carers feel able to provide a level of care, including physical contact, which demonstrates warmth, friendliness, and a positive regard for the child.

Physical contact should be offered and provided in a manner that is safe, protective and avoids the arousal of sexual expectations, feelings or in any way that reinforces sexual stereotypes.

Regarding physical affection, Southampton Fostering require that foster carers operate on the basis of "permission and consent". Children should be asked first if they would like a cuddle, hug or kiss and ideally if instigated initially by the child or young person. Children and young people need to be able to say 'no' and be taught by a caring adult that they can say 'no' if they do not want to be touched and what is appropriate and inappropriate touch.

Similarly, the sitting of a child on a foster carers lap should also operate on the basis of 'permission and consent,' with the age of the child and previous history being taken into account.

The Bathroom and Bathtime

All children and young people should be encouraged to develop skills in personal care in respect of washing themselves. Children should be given privacy in the bathroom as long as their age and stage of development makes it safe for them to do so.

Children should not share baths or showers unless agreed by the child's social worker. Fostering network advise that the bathroom door should be left ajar or unlocked if a carer is in the bathroom assisting a child.

Bathtime can provide foster carers the opportunity to provide structure and routine alongside enabling a child to have fun and manage personal care. It can also be a time of

anxiety for children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and trauma. Consideration should be given to who is best placed and most appropriate to undertake Bathtime – this should be discussed and agreed at the Placement Agreement Meeting.

Clothing and the way you dress

It is important to dress appropriately when in the house and garden. Make sure that all members of the fostering family have a dressing gown and slippers and wear appropriate nightwear. No-one in the household should walk around the house in underwear.

Summertime is more difficult as children and young people and adults may be in swimwear and less clothing. Decisions about appropriate clothing should be made with the child and young person, taking into account age and a young person's need to fit in with peers and current fashion.

Playing

Play is an essential part of healthy child development. Listen out when children are playing, especially when things go quiet! Foster carers should always have a 'line of sight' and doors should be left open so foster carers are to easily hear or see what is going on. Some things to think about:

- Children who have sexually abused should have close supervision whilst playing and careful consideration given to where they play.
- Play fighting should be discouraged, as children with a background of trauma may struggle with their emotional regulation and may also find it difficult to distinguish between play and real life. Play fighting may remind them of previous trauma experiences.
- Avoid tickling and wrestling games.
- When using bikes, skateboards etc., appropriate safety equipment should be used. It is acknowledged that this might be problematic for older children and individual circumstances will need to be discussed with the child's social worker.

We would encourage children to have 'play dates' and participate in ordinary play and leisure activities with their peers. Spending time with other children and adults, particularly sleepovers and 'play dates' in other people's homes, will need to be discussed and agreed with the child's social worker.

Bedrooms and Bedtime

Bedrooms

Standard 10.6 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards states:

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 provider should take 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.

Children need to have their privacy respected. They need their own space so that they can learn that they have the right to be safe and private. For some children it is important that they have somewhere to keep their possessions safe. Your family policy should be clear about bedroom rules; people must understand how threatening it can be for a child who has been abused to have their privacy invaded. As children grow older, they should be given increasing control over who goes into their room. Anyone who needs to go into a child's bedroom should ask permission first and should leave the door open. This applies to children as well as adults.

The sharing of beds with foster children is not allowed.

Foster carers will need to give consideration as to whether they need to alter the arrangements for their birth children in this respect. If a child is unwell and in need of help and comfort through the night then consideration needs to be given to alternative arrangements being made, for example the child sleeping on the sofa with the carer in a chair.

Adults should not get into a child's bed. When sitting with a child in their bedroom e.g. to read a bedtime story, consideration should be given to the child's history and experiences. Any concerns should be discussed with the SSW and alternative arrangements made if appropriate e.g. reading a story downstairs before bedtime. Sitting on the child's bed should be avoided if possible. It is advisable that the bedroom door is left ajar when an adult is in the room with a child.

The Safer Caring Plan should be amended to include such decisions and be child focused.

A 'sleeping arrangements' risk assessment should be completed when any changes to the policy need to be considered – i.e. holidays or when children are sleeping on a different level to the foster carers.

Bedtimes

Bedtimes are an opportunity for foster carers to provide structure and routine, but also care and emotional warmth. There is a balance to be struck between bedtime rules, safer caring and the opportunity for closeness and care. Likewise with bathtime, consideration needs to be given to as to who is the most appropriate person to carry out this task and when.

Intimate care, Menstruation, Enuresis and Encopresis

Intimate Care

If possible, children and young people should be supported and encouraged to undertake bathing, showers and other intimate care of themselves without relying on carers. If children are too young or unable to bathe, use the toilet or undertake hygiene routines, arrangements should be made to assist them. This should be discussed at the Placement Agreement Meeting and a discussion had and decision made around who is best placed to assist the child – this would usually be someone of the same gender.

Specific arrangements will need to be discussed for children and young people with disabilities or additional needs.

Children and young people should have privacy in the bathroom where appropriate and encouraged to be independent in an age-appropriate way – for example it may be possible to sit outside the bathroom so a child remains safe but has a sense of privacy.

Menstruation

This is a difficult area for many young women to talk about. Foster carers should be enabled to provide guidance in a way that is accepted by the young person and create a home environment that is open to usually 'taboo' and 'awkward' conversations. Wherever possible, young women should be supported and encouraged to keep their own supply of sanitary protection without having to request this from their foster carers. There should also be support and guidance for the disposal of sanitary protection.

Enuresis and Encopresis

If it is known or suspected that a child or young person is likely to experience enuresis, encopresis or may be prone to smearing, it should be discussed openly with the child, but with great sensitivity and with no judgement or sense of reprimand.

These discussions should begin at the Placement Agreement Meeting and be on-going as the child progresses in placement.

The following principles should be adopted:

- Talk to the child or young person in private, openly, and sensitively and without judgement or rebuke.
- Do not treat it as the fault of the child or young person or impose any form of sanctions.
- Do not require the child or young person to clear it up, unless this is an agreed part of the treatment strategy; arrange for the child or young person to be cleaned up and remove any soiled items to be cleaned sensitively.
- Keep a record – to assist with health input and patterns of behaviour.

Babysitters

Foster carers may be given delegated authority to arrange babysitters – this needs to be part of the Placement Agreement Meeting and agreed by the child's social worker.

Southampton Fostering require all regular 'babysitters' for foster children to be given Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) and, ideally, support network interviews should be completed for all regular alternative carers. Wherever possible and as a matter of course children should be introduced and meet all those who are offering alternative care. Babysitters should be at least 18 years old. However, it needs to be recognised that for some children, babysitters of this age will not be appropriate. Therefore, when choosing alternative carers, consideration needs to be given to the likely behaviour and challenges the children are likely to present.

Foster children should NEVER be used as sole carers for other children within the household.

Holidays

Family and Child Specific Safer Caring Plans will need to be reviewed when there is a change of environment, particularly when sleeping arrangements are changing due to restricted space, e.g. camping or caravanning. These changes should be discussed with social workers and children should be prepared in advance for the changes that may happen.

Travel insurance should be purchased for the child if the family is holidaying abroad or in the UK – foster carers are now expected to consider Covid-19 restrictions when arranging travel insurance and the impact of any quarantine/travel restrictions before and after travel.

Permission to take a child on holiday should always be sought from the child's social worker, prior to travel.

Transport and Travelling by Car

It is important to think about the specific needs of a child when travelling - who will be in the car with the child, and how does the child respond to travelling by car or any other means of transportation? Travelling can be a good opportunity for 1:1 with a child or young person and they may find it easier to talk without any eye contact. However, for a child who has or may have been abused, being alone in the car with an adult might be a scary time. If there is any concern, and travelling alone is unavoidable, consideration should be given to the child sitting in the back seat of the car.

Foster carers should ensure they have the correct car seats to meet the legal standards when transporting children. Any damaged seats must be replaced. Second-hand car seats should not be bought.

Foster carers have a responsibility to ensure the car is roadworthy, insured and has age appropriate car seats / seat belts. Certificates should be produced annually as part of the annual Foster Carer Review process.

Organised Trips

Going on school trips or trips with clubs are an essential part of a child's education and social development. This should be encouraged where appropriate. Consent must be given by the child's social worker and parent (where appropriate) and details of trip or holiday provided.

A risk assessment should be undertaken (or obtained from the organiser) and any actions agreed beforehand by the child's social worker and the foster carer.

Taking Photographs and Videos

Photographs of a child's time in care are an important part of their journey and life story and enable a child to form positive memories for their future.

It is important that foster carers should be sensitive to the wishes and feelings of the child and their parents in respect of taking photos and videos. Consideration should be given to

the significance different cultures place on the taking photographs. Foster carers should ask children before they take their photo and if a child says no that decision should be respected.

Foster carers should not take photos of children in the bath, shower or undressed.

Photographs of children in your care should NEVER be posted by foster carers on social networking sites on the internet. Some young people may choose to post their own photographs and guidance should be given to young people about making positive choices regarding what they wish to share on-line. Southampton Fostering Team offers training in respect of on-line safety.

Foster carers should also be aware that digital photographs taken on mobile phones and some digital cameras hold metadata i.e. gps and location information embedded within the digital image. Care should be taken when passing on digital photographs to avoid providing information about a child or young person's whereabouts to those with whom such information should not be shared. It is possible to strip out the metadata, but this takes a knowledge of IT and software that is quite advanced.

If you are concerned about sharing metadata contained within digital photos, the most secure option may be to print out photographs to be given to anyone who should not know a child's whereabouts. Care should also be taken when taking photographs near schools, road signs and any other areas that may make a child's location identifiable from an image.

Internet and Social Media

Standard 4.4 - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards states:

“Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the house or when using the internet or social media.”

Smart phones, computers and the internet are integral to the lives of children and young people. Foster carers should ensure that children are helped to use these tools sensibly and safely, with appropriate safeguards in place against access to inappropriate material.

1. Use of the internet:
 - a. Computers should be used in communal rooms in the house, e.g. living room, dining room, kitchen
 - b. Ensure that an adult is on hand to check what sites a child is viewing
 - c. Be clear that no personal information should be given out or personal photos uploaded
 - d. Set reasonable timescales for being “online” and agree this with the social worker
 - e. Be clear that there are many positive things about the internet as long as certain rules are applied.

Use of smart phones / mobile phones:

- a. If a child has a mobile phone carers must ensure that the social worker is aware
- b. If concerned that an unauthorized contact is taking place with family members, carers must inform the social worker;
- c. Carers should monitor usage and who the young person is phoning

Training is available for foster carers regarding on-line safety and guidance can also be found via various websites including the NSPCC and CEOP.

Education about Sex and Sexuality

Having appropriate, healthy and positive education around sex and sexuality is an important part of a young person's development of a positive identity and self-image.

All children need to have sex education, but it must be responsive to their age and understanding, and for children looked after, geared to their previous experiences. Use appropriate language that accurately describes parts of the body and aspects of sexual health.

Before embarking on discussions around sex or sexuality it is best to have a discussion with the child or young person's social worker and your Supervising Social Worker. It is important that all professionals involved with the child or young person are 'on the same page' when it comes to these discussions, especially if there is a history of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. Ideally, any discussion should be planned and discussed with the child's social worker before taking place. It is possible that the child or young person may steer the conversation into areas where you feel uncomfortable or uninformed, it is okay to suggest that you will help the child talk about the issues with someone else they feel comfortable and confident talking with i.e. their social worker or a teacher.

An essential message for children is the right to say "No" and to protect themselves from abuse.

CCTV

Foster carers who wish to install CCTV to protect their property are required to seek legal advice prior to installation. Security cameras to the exterior of the property may be governed by the Data Protection Act if the cameras extend their view beyond the bounds of the property, and there are strict regulations about the images captured by security cameras. Further information on this is available from the Information Commissioner's Office - www.ico.org.uk

CCTV or video recording is not to be used within the home, or for the surveillance of children within placement. Children have a legal and moral right to privacy, which needs to be respected. In addition, the child (depending on their age and understanding) or the parent would need to be given information and sign their consent to the use of the recording equipment.

Carers wishing to install external CCTV or internal monitoring equipment must inform their Supervising Social Worker prior to installation and obtain written agreement. The nature

and purpose of the video equipment must be included in the health and safety check, and safer caring plan.

Action when a child is placed

Foster carers should be provided with full information about the foster child and his/her family, including details of abuse or possible abuse, both in the interests of the child and of the foster family.

Foster Carers should have a Safer Caring Plan in place for each child placed which covers any specific risks and how these should be managed by the foster carers.

In emergency situations, it may not be possible to provide foster carers with full information about a child due to the nature of the emergency placement. However, it is important that foster carers feel able to ask questions and that information is shared at the earliest opportunity. We understand that if information becomes available that means that a foster carer is no longer a good match for a child or young person, the placement may need to be ended early.

Children who go missing

Foster carers should monitor the whereabouts of their foster children, their patterns of absence and contacts. Foster carers should follow the standard procedure whenever a foster child is missing from their home. This will involve notifying the local authority and where necessary the Police of any unauthorised absence by a child.

All incidents of a child going missing should also be reported to the Supervising Social Worker within 24 hours as a significant event.

Safeguarding Responsibilities

The local authority's duty to undertake a Section 47 Enquiry, when there are concerns about possible significant harm to a child, applies on the same basis to children in foster care as it does to children who live with their own families.

Visitors to the Foster Home

Any visit to the foster home by a social worker, police officer, Children's Guardian, school teacher etc. in relation to the child should be recorded by the foster carer. Any concerns must be raised immediately with the child's social worker and supervising social worker.

Visits by Supervising Social Worker must be undertaken within agreed timescales, and any concerns raised with the Fostering Team Manager.

Visits to a child by their social worker must be undertaken within agreed timescales. All visits must be recorded and any concerns should be raised with the Supervising Social Worker.

Visits to the foster home by professionals are a statutory requirement and access to the home should be a priority. Covid-19 restrictions may impact upon accessibility, but all

efforts should be made to enable a child to be seen by their social worker in the foster home within the statutory timescales.

Recording

Supervising social workers should ensure foster carers are aware of recording expectations. They should advise the foster carers of the importance of maintaining daily records and recording them in a timely fashion. It is essential that foster carers make a note of any incidents such as inappropriate behavior or speech, worrying phone calls and anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or in any way concerned. Carers should note others present and keep accurate notes of any conversations of concern.

It is equally important that a child's achievements should be recorded in the same way. For many children, a foster carer's recording of their early life is their only link to their life story and details such as their first words, first steps, first achievements at school are essential to their sense of identity, well-being and positive personal development.

If a child makes a disclosure the foster carer should record what was said by whom, the date, time and the sign the document and note if any other person was present. If another adult was present they should also sign the document.

Alcohol, Smoking and Substance misuse

Southampton Fostering Service expects all foster carers to provide up to date, factual and accurate information and guidance to children and young people about the danger of alcohol, smoking and substance misuse. Training is provided for all foster carers who wish to develop their knowledge in this area.

Southampton City Council has a responsibility to promote the good health of the children in our care and we therefore strive to provide children with smoke-free foster homes.

Foster carers are required to supervise children and young people appropriately at times when alcohol or illegal substances could be accessed, i.e. social events, and are expected to seek guidance and support if a young person is believed to be using illegal substances or misusing alcohol.

Foster carers should never purchase alcohol, cigarettes or tobacco for any child or young person.

Foster carers are required to store alcohol, matches, lighters, e-cigarettes or vapes in the home, so that they are NOT accessible to a child or young person.

Foster carers found to be using illegal substances will be suspended and their approval reviewed. It is acknowledged that some foster carer may have a history of substance misuse and this will be considered as part of the fostering assessment. Where children or young people are placed with connected carers, this part of the Safer Caring policy will be used as best practice and based on the needs of the child.

It is important that foster carers remain responsible for a child at all times and are able to respond to any emergency situation that may arise for a child or young person in their care. Therefore, the consumption of alcohol should be carefully considered in terms of the child's

needs, their history of possible parental drug and alcohol misuse and the likely need to transport a child.

It is acknowledged that sensible and social alcohol consumption will occur in foster homes and it is important that children and young people are provided with positive role models in relation to alcohol. Foster carers should ensure that children and young people are never witness to or exposed to adults in the fostering household or wider social network who are drunk or consuming alcohol excessively. Foster carers who choose to consume alcohol in the company of a child or young person must consider the impact of this on the child or young person and put themselves at potential risk of being assessed by others as unable or unfit to retain responsibility for a child's welfare. Role modelling positive and healthy behaviour in this area is essential.

Foster carers should NEVER transport a child or young person after consuming alcohol, even if they consider themselves to be under the 'drink drive' limit.

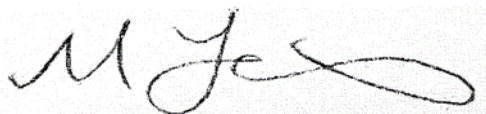
Governance

The Fostering Service Manager and Fostering Team Manager are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented.

If any foster carer is found to be in breach of these guidelines, this will be addressed initially, by the supervising social worker. A practice review report may be compiled and an early foster carer review initiated, which may lead to deregistration.

This policy will be reviewed every two years and/or in line with changes to legislation.

Signed



Date 16/03/23

Matt Jenkins

Head of Resources

Southampton City Council, Children and Learning.