

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Service

Bedroom Sharing Policy

The aim of the Fostering Service is to meet the Best Practice principle of enabling every child in foster care to have the option of their own bedroom, and our foster carer recruitment strategy seeks to ensure that sufficient numbers and variety of carers are recruited to meet this aim. There are some occasions where this is not possible and this policy outlines information in relation to bedroom sharing.

1. Legal Framework

1.1. This policy is based on the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS), and the Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

1.2. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 prescribe a “usual fostering limit” for foster carers of three (unrelated) children, (the limit does not apply if the children are siblings). The schedule also makes provision for this limit to be exceeded under an “exemption” when specified factors have been considered and satisfied. However, neither the Act nor the Schedule makes any requirement concerning the number of bedrooms to be available in order for the limit to apply, or for an exemption to the limit to be granted.

1.3. Neither The Fostering Services Regulations 2011, nor the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (both of which now govern the placement of children in foster care) specify the requirements of the bedroom accommodation to be available in relation to the approval terms of the foster carer. However, the statutory guidance to the latter regulations emphasizes the general principle that, in any placement decision:

“.. the Authority must be satisfied that the placement with foster carers is the best way of meeting their duty under Section 22 (of the 1989 Act).... and that the specific placement is the most appropriate, having regard to all the circumstances. In choosing the most appropriate placement, authorities can face a difficult task in ensuring that all the assessed needs of the child can be met. There are often practical limitations on choice which may mean that the ideal placement may not be available.”

1.4. Standard 10.6 of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) identifies that:

“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 takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The



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decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.`

1.5. Standard 10.1 of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011) identifies that:

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

2. Bedroom Availability within Swindon Borough Council Fostering Homes:

2.1. As a general principle, applications will not be accepted from prospective carers wanting to care for children age 3 and above who do not have a spare bedroom available for foster children.

2.2. Applications where prospective carers do not have a spare bedroom, will only be considered for caring for babies and infants age 0-2 years.

2.3. In all fostering households:

- Babies under 6 months of age should sleep in a cot in the foster carer's bedroom.
- Babies and infants up to age 2 years may share the foster carers bedroom, where appropriate.

2.4. Children in the home should have adequate privacy and bedroom space, to preserve their dignity and have provisions for the child to keep their possessions.

2.5. Children entering the care of a new fostering family should be appropriately matched with a home that has appropriate bedroom space, taking into account the age and needs of the child.

3. Bedroom Sharing within Swindon Borough Council Fostering Homes:

3.1. Siblings and close relative children over 3 years old may only share a bedroom together, where there is a written risk assessment agreed by the Fostering Service Manager.

3.2. Unrelated children over 3 years old will not share a bedroom, unless in exceptional circumstances and a written risk assessment is completed and approved by the Fostering Service Manager.

3.3. Children over the age of 3 years will not share a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex.

3.4. Where bedroom sharing is being considered, a Bedroom Sharing risk assessment must be completed and considered when making an appropriate match with a child

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in an identified foster home, to ensure bedroom sharing is appropriate and does not hinder the child's safety and well-being.

3.5. The Bedroom Sharing risk assessment must outline consideration of the following factors:

- Assessment of the risks presented in sharing;
- The management of privacy;
- Ensuring adequate personal space;
- The views of the children's Social Workers and parents;
- The wishes and feelings of the children concerned must be recorded and considered.

4. Matching

4.1. Social Workers should demonstrate consultation with existing children living in fostering homes, this should include consideration of a risk assessment when moving a child into a new foster home, especially if it is expected that a child will be sharing a bedroom.

4.2. Forward planning needs to be incorporated at the point of agreeing a fostering arrangement for a child, in terms of what will happen when a child requires their own bedroom, and considering whether a foster carer has sufficient bedroom space in the medium-term future. This will prevent unnecessary moves for the child living with the foster carer.

4.3. A risk assessment will take place as part of the matching process and will be recorded in the Placement Plan documents. Issues to be considered include:

- i. Age and gender of the children sharing;
- ii. Sleeping arrangements, bunk beds* etc;
- iii. Relationships with other children in the placement;
- iv. Specific needs of the child sharing a room i.e. enuresis, children waking in the night, requiring the light on etc;
- v. Sexualised behaviour of the child being placed and the children in the placement;
- vi. The provision in placement for privacy and adequate personal space including storage, with special consideration being given to a child in adolescence.

5. Care of Babies Under the Age of 6 Months

5.1. At no point should a baby sleep in the foster carer's bed.

5.2. Babies under 6 months of age should sleep in a cot in the foster carer's bedroom.

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5.3. Bedroom provision should be anticipated in advance of when the child is ready to move into a bedroom of its own.

6. Sibling Groups

6.1. After the age of 3 years old only same sex sibling or close relatives may be risk assessed for sharing a bedroom.

6.2. Where a child looked after is suggested to share a bedroom with another child, a bedroom risk assessment will need to be considered and completed.

7. Bunk Beds

7.1. Bunk beds need special consideration, as they do not always allow for privacy for the child. Bunk beds should be avoided if the child experiences enuresis, and if possible should only be used if children using them have other areas in the home that allow for privacy and the children are siblings. Bunk beds should also be safe given the age and mobility of the children. The CoramBAAF health and safety checklist states: 'Upper bunk beds have secure safety rails and ladders, and are not being used for children under the age of six'.

8. Family Holidays

8.1. We positively encourage carers to include their foster children in family holidays. The same principles as outlined above should however still apply – the planned holiday and proposed sleeping arrangements should be discussed in advance with the child/ren's social worker(s) and foster carer's supervising social worker, and a written risk assessment prepared. The same expectations of the foster carers in terms of safe care practices will of course still apply, and indeed extra vigilance around the sleeping arrangements during the holiday may be necessary.

8.2. Where satisfactory (or affordable) arrangements cannot be made to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all the children involved in the holiday arrangements, it may be necessary to make alternative care arrangements for the foster child, for the duration of the carer's family holiday.

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