

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

The National Minimum Standards 2011 sets down 6 standards in Section 10 for providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child as follows.

10.1	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.
10.2	The foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated; is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. Outdoor spaces which are part of the premises are safe, secure and well maintained.
10.3	Foster Carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.
10.4	Foster Carers understand the service's policy concerning safety for children in foster home and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The service's policy is regularly reviewed in line with the most recent guidance from relevant bodies.
10.5	The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the Fostering Service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.
10.6	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 decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing, where bedroom sharing is agreed.

These standards have been adopted by the Swindon Borough Council's fostering service: 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.

Health and Safety Checklist

The Fostering Service needs to be satisfied that their Foster Carers provide suitable accommodation that is safe and nurturing to care for children and young people they support. The Assessing Social Worker is required to complete a Health and Safety checklist during the assessment process. This checklist should be updated as part of the annual review of approved Foster Carers.

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

The Health and Safety checklist should form part of a wider assessment and ongoing supervision of the Foster Carers. The Health and Safety checklist should be updated when any structural work, or changes to the existing property are made. If Foster Carers move then a new Health and Safety checklist should be completed. Supervising Social Workers should complete the recommendations and actions following the completed Health and Safety assessment with Foster Carers. There is also a duty for Supervising Social Workers to consider the Health and Safety Standards of any second homes including holiday homes and caravans if a child or young person is using these facilities.

Health and Safety Matters

More accidents happen when people are in a hurry, under stress, or in unfamiliar surroundings.

Falls are the most common cause of accidental injury to children and young people. Many accidents can be prevented by moving or removing dangerous objects out of a child's reach.

Many childhood accidental injuries occur at home and in the garden. Ponds pose a particular risk for babies, toddlers and young children. Even a small amount of water can pose a risk to a small child.

95% of burns happen at home. Burns and scalds particularly affect babies and very young children, with scalds from hot drinks being the most common cause.

Children grow and learn new skills rapidly. It is important that the foster carers who care for them know what risks each stage brings. It is impossible to childproof a home but knowledge of the potential for accidents and of effective safety measures can reduce the risk of serious injury.

Choking or poisoning risks for younger children needs to be considered. It is important for foster carers not to leave anything lying around which could be a choking or poisoning including hazards such as button batteries, e-cigarettes and small magnets. Children can also suffer strangulation from ribbons and cords that they get tangled in.

The Risks to Foster Children

There are number of reasons why children in foster care are particularly at risk of accidents. Foster Carer's own children will be aware of the potential hazards in their house, as they will have grown up with them. Most foster children joining the household will wish to investigate their new surroundings and the absence of good safety measures will increase the risk of injury.

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

It is important to know the child and ask about any risks before the child moves to live in a fostering home. These risks should be detailed in the child's Placement Plan.

A child or a young person may not have had much guidance around health and safety matters so it is imperative the Foster Carers keep a close eye on the child or young person initially to keep them safe from harm. Chronological age is not always an indicator of a child's abilities – other factors need to be considered around health and safety such as developmental delay, hyperactivity etc. Any issues around self-harming should also be addressed in the child's Placement Plan with clear guidance around what items should be locked away such as medication, knives etc.

Fire Precautions

- Install a smoke alarm on each floor of your home
- Every foster home should have a Fire Plan in place and this should be discussed with any child or young person in the home.
- Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue should be contacted to request a Safe and Well Visit, where they carry out a room by room check to provide you with appropriate advice and support to keep your household safe from the risk of fire.
- Exit routes should always be kept clear of obstacles and keys should be accessible.
- Fire and rescue services can complete fire safety checks for Foster Carers and are a valuable source of information.
- Attic rooms with one exit can be difficult and may need a smoke alarm.
- Does everyone know what to do in the event of a fire and if no exit is possible- go into a room, shut the door, put a blanket at the door and call for help.
- Practice fire escape plan regularly.

All fostering households must have an agreed fire plan which should form part of a wider assessment and ongoing supervision of the Foster Carers.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) cannot be seen, smelt or tasted, so you do not know when it is present. Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that is produced by fossil fuel such as gas, coal, oil or wood burners.

A build up of carbon monoxide can be extremely dangerous and cause a variety of symptoms, or even death.

Foster Carers must have a carbon monoxide monitor/s present in their home in the correct places, such as near gas appliances (cooker, boiler, fire etc).

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

Foster Carers must ensure that all heating and cooking appliances are serviced regularly and a Gas Safety certificate is in place. The Agency should check that this is in place and mark it down on the Health and Safety checklist that it has been seen.

Gardens and outside play

Good supervision is important when a child or young person is outside. Age and disability have to be considered in this judgement.

- All accessible areas should be safe and secure for all children and young people within the household. Garden exits should be secure. Garden sheds should be locked and greenhouses and cold frames should be made of toughen glass to avoid injuries;
- All hazards should be reduced and appropriate storage for garden equipment and insecticides should be locked away;
- Water butts, ponds, hot tubs, swimming pools or streams should be netted, covered or fenced off;
- Extreme caution must be exercised when using barbecues; these should never be left unattended;
- Washing lines should be out of reach of children who this could be a hazard for;
- Any poisonous plants or trees should be safeguarded and the child or young person supervised around them or taught not to handle them or they should be removed from the garden;
- Foster Carers need to ensure that good supervision takes place in the garden areas, including play equipment such as trampolines, sand pits etc. All equipment should be safe and age appropriate.

Car Safety

It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all passengers in the car use seat belts or appropriate child restraints. It is also the responsibility of the driver to ensure that passengers are carried safely and vehicles should not be overloaded.

Cars must be well maintained, regularly serviced, adequately insured and covered by a current MOT certificate if the age of the car requires it. It is the responsibility of the Agency to check the Foster Carer's documentation initially. Adequate insurance should be in place for transporting children. The Agency will complete regular checks around car safety. Car keys should be stored safely to avoid a child or young person taking the Foster Carers' car or losing the keys.

General

- Matches, lighters and sharp knives should be stored safely;
- Bleaches, disinfectants, aerosol sprays and other dangerous substances must be kept out of the reach of small children, or locked away. Cupboard locks should be used - age appropriate;

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

- Medicines, tablets, cigarettes and alcohol should also be securely stored in a locked cupboard or cabinet;
- Stair gates must be fixed securely where appropriate;
- Windows should be fitted with lock restrictors and keys should be kept at hand in case of emergencies;
- Pull cords on window blinds can be a hazard to children and therefore should be reduced in length.
- Protection covers should be used for plug sockets.

Hygiene

Standards around hygiene, cleanliness and infection control should be maintained by the Foster Carer. The Agency should make sure as part of the assessment, and by ongoing monitoring, that this is the case.

The Foster Carer should advise the Agency if there is an issue around infection control within the household such as illnesses such as Covid-19 or scabies, and the Agency should seek advice about whether this needs to be reported to the Health Protection Agency to seek further advice around treatment and isolation.

If a Foster Carer or child or young person has Hepatitis B then measures need to be put in place to prevent the spread of it such as not sharing towels, care needs to be taken when cleaning wounds, use of gloves.

Diet and Nutrition

Foster Carers should support a child and young person with healthy eating and offer a varied and balanced diet. Good hygiene standards are particularly important with food hygiene.

Building and Contents

Foster Carers are expected to keep their homes in good repair, adequately insured and safe and hazard-free for children and young people. The foster home should be warm, adequately furnished and decorated.

All fixtures and fittings should meet regulated standards. All glass that can be reached by children should be toughened to relevant British Safety Standards, or fitted with protective safety film.

Electrical equipment such as portable heaters should be well maintained and in good working order.

Gas fires, boilers and all other gas appliances should be regularly serviced by an appropriate qualified person.

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

Foster Carers must ensure they have adequate household insurance and notify their insurers they are fostering. Insurance companies will generally provide the same cover as for any other member of the household, but this will usually exclude cover for deliberate acts of damage by children. If such damage occurs and is not covered by the Foster Carers' insurers then advice should be sought from the Agency and/or the child's Social Worker to see if any of the costs can be reimbursed.

Other properties

Health and safety checklists should be in place for Foster Carers who have second homes, including holiday homes and caravans if a child or young person is also staying there.

Accommodation, bedroom space and sharing

The Foster Carers' house should have enough bedroom space for each child placed and should be able to comfortably accommodate those who live there. The accommodation should reflect the child's assessed need for privacy, space and specific needs of a child who has disability. Consideration must be given to whether they need a downstairs room for access, adaptable bathroom etc.

Every child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible this arrangement needs to be agreed by the placing Local Authority and a risk assessment needs to be in place considering the child's history, their wishes and feelings and any other factors that seem pertinent (please refer to the Bedroom Sharing Policy). The Agency should complete a bedroom sharing risk assessment with the child or young person, foster carers, children's Social Worker and any other relevant party such as the child's parent.

Reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

The Lullaby Trust (formally The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID)) and the Department of Health and Social Care offer advice to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome.

CCTV in the household

The Data Protection Act has significant implications for anyone already using or thinking of installing a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) System and it is important that Foster Carers discuss this with their Supervising Social Worker before arranging to have CCTV installed as this should be brought to the attention of the Agency Manager. The regulations and guidance relating to CCTV are covered by the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18). This legislation is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and Foster Carers must ensure that any CCTV system is operated within regulatory guidelines.

Swindon Borough Council
Fostering Service
Household Safety Policy

The use of CCTV in a foster home must be considered as necessary, proportionate and known to all those living in, or coming to the home. Everyone should be aware it is in place. CCTV should not be sited in a bedroom, bathroom or toilet and anyone living in the home, or responsible for a child who is living with the carer, should be shown where the cameras are sited. At no time should CCTV be an alternative to carers providing supervision or oversight of children and young people.

The Health and Safety checklist should note that CCTV is in place and information should be recorded around who has been consulted and the reason why CCTV is in place. This should be reviewed regularly by the Agency.

Firearms

Prospective Foster Carers must disclose if they hold or have access to firearms. The Assessing Social Worker must see where all guns and ammunition are stored and complete a risk assessment. The Fire Arms Risk assessment should form part of a wider assessment and ongoing supervision of the Foster Carers. Firearms must be stored securely and children or young people should have no access to or be involved in activities involving firearms in any way.

As part of the Foster Carer's review of approval, the security of arms and ammunition and the ownership of a current firearms certificate will be verified. The Agency should inspect the storage of firearms as part of any unannounced visit.

There is an additional section on the health and safety checklist which must be completed by the Agency if a Foster Carer possesses a firearm or other weapon.

Additional policies, procedures and risk assessments

- Foster Care Agreement
- Safer Care Agreement
- Child Individual Safer Caring Agreement
- Smoking Policy
- Smoking Risk Assessment
- Foster Carers possessing guns and weapons
- Dangerous Dogs and Pet Ownership Policy
- Dog Assessment
- Pet Assessment
- Fire Plan
- Health and Safety Checklist
- Hot Tub Assessment