

**SERIOUS
ABOUT
SOCIAL WORK**

Safer Care in Foster Homes

Document last updated: March 2016
Document review due: March 2019

Safer Care in Foster Homes

About this document

Title	Safer Caring Policy for Foster Care
Purpose	To provide guidance for assessing social workers and foster carers regarding safer caring in the foster home.
Updated by	Rosemarie Cronin, CWDC Co-ordinator (Fostering)
Approved by	Children in Care Workstream
Date	March 2016
Version number	4
Status	
Review frequency	Three-yearly
Next review date	March 2019

Version Control

Date Issued:	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
March 2016	4	Updated introduction	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	4	Added in foster carers and short break carers will also be expected to complete post approval training on safer caring in line with the Personal Development Plan	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	4	Included information about Delegated Authority and how this may contribute to safer caring	Rosemarie Cronin

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Introduction and Legal Framework

The key emphasis within all the fostering legislation and the Children Act is that the welfare of the children is paramount and that they should feel and be safe.

The purpose and reason for foster placements are to help children and young people who have experienced neglect, abuse and trauma feel safe and help them heal and rediscover the world in a new and positive way. The trauma that a child has experienced in their life will impact upon their attachment relationships, development and functioning.

Safer caring is not about absolute safety (if such a thing exists!), it is about understanding and managing harm and risk, and seeing the positives of risk and how it forms part of enabling children and young people to understand and heal from their experiences.

One of the key tasks for foster carers is to provide a safe and secure base for the child or young person to enable the healing process and give a safe base from which risks can be taken. While doing this foster carers also need to ensure that they and others in their household are kept safe.

Standard 4 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) is about safeguarding children and states:

- 4.1) Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all foster placements. Children are protected from abuse and others forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation)
- 4.2) Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children.
- 4.3) 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.
- 4.4) 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.
- 4.5) The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment.
- 4.6) Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care 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.
- 4.7) 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.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with other policies which impact upon safe care within the foster home. This includes the **health and safety policy, bedroom sharing policy, countering bullying policy and the fostering guidance for safer use of computers, the internet and social media with children and young people.**

Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge

The Essex Pledge to children and young people in our care was written and agreed alongside the children and young people we look after.

Children and young people said they wanted foster families to be supported to look after them. Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge states that they will do their very best to support foster families so they can provide children and young people with a safe and settled place to live. The following policy, guidance and procedures help us to achieve this.

Fostering Policy

Essex County Council will ensure that all efforts are made to keep a children and young people safe from abuse within the foster home and all members of, and visitors to the fostering household are protected as far as reasonably practicable from abuse and risk of false allegations.

Guidance and Procedures

1. All foster carers are provided with a copy of the Fostering Network Safer Caring Book during their assessment process.
2. Assessing Social Workers discuss safe care with the prospective foster carer and help them to think about safe care issues for them and their family
3. All fostering households should have a safe care family plan in place prior to being approved (or as soon as possible for those foster carers who are temporary approved). The guidance for completing this is within the Fostering Network Safer Caring Book.
 - The safe care family plan should be completed and discussed with all family members in an age appropriate way.
 - All household members should sign to agree the safe care plan
4. All foster carers undertake safe care training. This is completed as part of the skills to foster training pre-approval. From April 2016 foster carers will also be expected to undertake safer caring training post approval, this will be an opportunity to build on what has been learned previously and use the experience that they have gained through fostering. It is anticipated that this will become available as face to face training and this is currently being developed. Other available training includes distance learning or e-learning. Other training courses can also contribute to safer caring e.g. use of digital media, health and safety. This post approval training is not compulsory for family and friends carers but is recommended. Safer caring should also be evidenced through completion of the relevant Training, Support and Development (TSD) Induction Standards for all foster carers, short break carers and family and friends carers.
5. Once approved the family safe care plan should be updated when a new child or young person is introduced into the household. The family safe care plan should include the physical environment as well as additional sources of harm there may be for a particular child. This would need to take into account the following:
 - What is known about the past experiences of the child or young person
 - Age and understanding of the child or young person

- Any known behaviours of the child or young person either putting themselves or others at risk
- Consideration of social media regarding knowledge of and access to it and how best to ensure that children and young people stay safe in their use of it

If, as the placement continues, more significant information is gained the family safe care plan should also be updated.

6. All carers should be provided with and be clear about the delegated authority they have for the children and young people that are placed with them.

As well as delegated authority being important in a very practical way for keeping the child safe it is also important for the relationship connection between the carer and the child. Creating a secure base is about building trust, valuing and promoting the child's need to be assertive, effective and competent and be able to explore and learn. This can be achieved much more effectively if there is well considered delegated authority in place, as a carer is able to respond to a child's needs in a timely and direct way. This in turn creates trust for the child in the carer to understand and respond to them and their needs. This builds on the reciprocal relationship between the carer and child.

7. An up-to-date copy of the Family Safer Care Plan should be kept on the foster carers file
8. Foster carers should keep up to date foster carer logs which should be read and signed by the supervising social worker on a regular basis (see record keeping policy). Reflection on these logs should also be part of supervision and may contribute to the family safer caring plan.
9. If a foster carer has any concerns regarding their ability to provide safe care for a particular child or young person or if they feel that they are at risk of an allegation, this should be reported to the supervising social worker and the social worker of the child or young person immediately

Family Safer Caring Plan

1. Household Members (include all adults and children in the household)

Name	Date of birth	Relationship	Have they been involved with the writing of this plan	Has the plan been shared with them

2. Bedrooms

Think about:

- *putting children to bed,*
- *bedtime stories,*
- *children’s possessions,*
- *how is the bedroom used? For example, is the bedroom mainly for sleeping, is it a play area? If so, how will that be managed e.g. open door policy?*
- *How do you maintain privacy for adults and children/young people,*
- *How will people’s personal space be respected,*

3. Bathtime

Think about:

- *How you are going to give privacy,*
- *Who helps younger children or children with additional needs,*
- *Who helps wash and dress younger children,*
- *How will privacy be maintained for adults and children,*

4. Leisure time

Think about:

- *How do you supervise leisure in and out of the home,*
- *What would you need to know before agreeing an overnight stay,*
- *Arrangements for playing with friends,*
- *How do you keep everyone safe during activities e.g. cycling, trampolining, horse-riding,*

5. Social Media and the Internet

Think about:

- *How do you help children and young people to stay safe online*
- *Parental controls,*
- *Any restrictions regarding use of phones, gaming consoles, computers etc,*
- *What happens if someone doesn't feel safe online e.g. cyber bullying,*

6. Transport

Think about:

- *Arrangements for travelling in the car, e.g. front seat,*
- *What appropriate equipment should be used,*

7. Supporting the Child

Think about:

- *Who you would ask to 'babysit' or look after the child/young person in an emergency,*
- *How well do they know the child and how will you prepare them to keep the child safe,*

8. Showing Affection

Think about:

- *How you show affection in your family,*
- *How will you be sure if this is ok for children that you care for,*
- *How would you encourage an environment where children and adults respect each other's space and can say no if they are uncomfortable,*

9. Taking Photos or Video

Think about:

- *How do you manage photographs and social media e.g. facebook*
- *What circumstances is it ok to take photos,*
- *How are photographs shared,*

10. Names

Think about:

- *What would you encourage the children/young people to call you*

11. Holidays

Think about:

- *How would bedroom arrangements be sorted,*
- *Would risk assessments be needed if children were sharing a bedroom?*
- *Are there any particular issues you may need to consider when going on holiday with children who are in care (you may want to use your safe caring plan as a checklist!)*

12. Smoking

Think about:

- *Does anyone in your household smoke? If so where are they allowed to smoke,*
- *If you are a smoking household, how are you going to provide a positive role model to any children you look after? If young people placed with you smoke how will this be managed?*
- *Are electronic cigarettes used? If so how is this managed within the household,*
- *What would you do if there was a change of circumstances and someone within your household started smoking,*

13. Managing Behaviour

Think about:

- *What strategies might you use to encourage good behaviour?*
- *What are your expectations regarding behaviour?*
- *What sanctions may be used to discourage unwanted behaviour, taking into account children's previous experiences e.g. time out in the bedroom may not be appropriate,*

14. Pets

Think about:

- *Animals not sleeping in bedrooms*
- *Who feeds the animals?*
- *Where do the animals sleep?*
- *How will you maintain the safety of both the animals and any children/young people?*

15. What if.....

Think about:

- *What happens if a child or young person feels ill, including at night*
- *If a child or young person in the home feels frightened or upset e.g. night terrors*
- *If a child or young person can't sleep*
- *If a child or young person is worried about something*
- *Anything else that you feel should be considered to ensure a safe environment for all*