

Procedures and Guidance for changes within the Fostering Household

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About This Document

Title	Procedures and Guidance for changes within the Fostering Household
Purpose	To provide guidance to supervising and assessing social workers when there are changes in the fostering household. This includes new partners as well as carers who were in a partnership and are now a single carer
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June 2017	2.0	Updated terms used	Rosemarie Cronin
June 2017	2.1	Added couple relationship to Guidance in Appendix 3	Linda Leeder

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** Single foster carers may form new partnerships or other significant relationships and any such changes in the fostering household/circumstances need to be considered. Forming new relationships requires the investment of both energy and time and will impact on the developing relationships within the household. These will need to be reviewed to ensure that the fostering role is not adversely affected. Situations will also occur when a foster carer has a relationship break down or is bereaved and, in such situations, a new assessment should be undertaken to recognise the new situation.
- 1.2** For the purposes of this guidance a **new partner** is defined as “a significant person with whom the foster carer is having/intending/expected to develop a relationship, which is committed and serious.”
- 1.3** If a foster carer is single at the point of their application, it should be discussed during their initial assessment what would happen should they form a new partnership or a significant relationship. For those foster carers who experience separation, bereavement or divorce, while fostering, this discussion regarding new relationships should be covered as part of their reassessment as a single foster carer.
- 1.4** Approved foster carers should be made aware of the following:
- The foster carer would be expected to carry on any relationship within the context of a safer caring plan.
 - The supervising social worker should be informed by the foster carer when they are in a new relationship.
 - The foster carer should be aware that an assessment will be undertaken and presented to the fostering panel.

2. Fostering Procedure - New Partners

- 2.1** This document outlines the procedures regarding a new assessment. It is important that foster carers are aware that when they are embarking on a new relationship this will impact upon the household and on any children, who are being looked after. Therefore, this process will help to recognise the different stages of a relationship and allow for the relationship to develop, while also introducing the different aspects of fostering and maintaining safer care boundaries for all those connected with the fostering household.

2.2 Stage 1 - Initial stages of the relationship, i.e. No contact with foster child/home.

- Foster carer to inform the supervising social worker that they are beginning a relationship and whether it is the intention that the new partner will visit the foster home on a regular basis. The impact of this new relationship upon the foster carer will also be discussed.
- Supervising social worker to reiterate that an assessment will be needed as/when/if the relationship progresses and meet the new partner if the foster carer agrees.
- Supervising social worker recommends that the foster carer informs the new partner of her/his fostering status and that this will lead to a future assessment.

2.3 Stage 2 - New partner visits very regularly and/or stays over at the foster home on a regular basis when the foster children are in placement.

- DBS check to be undertaken. For the purpose of this policy, when new partners are visiting the household very regularly or staying overnight, they should be treated as a member of the fostering household when completing the DBS check.
- Viability assessment of new partner to be undertaken (see Appendix 1).
- A Confidentiality Statement should be signed by the new partner (see Appendix 2).
- The supervising social worker should ensure that the new partner is aware of the allegations/ complaint procedures.
- The supervising social worker reviews the Safe Caring Plan for the foster household to reflect the change in household composition.
- The child/young person's social worker should talk to the foster child(ren) about the new partner to gain their understanding and views.
- The supervising social worker, in conjunction with the foster carer and the new partner, clarifies the involvement of the new partner in respect of childcare responsibilities within the household.
- The new partner can be offered the opportunity to attend the Skills to Foster training, but this would not become compulsory until stage 3.
- The viability assessment and household review paperwork should be sent to Quadrant Service Managers to sign off once all the checks are completed.

2.4 Stage 3 - New partner moves into foster home.

- Supervising social worker progresses updated Form F or Connected Persons assessment, to be completed within 6 months of the partner moving into the household.
- References are taken up during this stage in line with the usual assessment process for Form F or Connected Persons assessment.
- A Household Review should be undertaken to include the new partner.
- Skills to Foster training to be completed, if not done so already.
- Process of approval in line with the Recruitment and Assessment Policy.
- First Household Review, after 12 months of new partner being approved, should be returned to the fostering panel as a first review following approval.

See additional Guidance of key issues to be explored when updating a Form F to include a new partner (*Appendix 3*).

3. Updated assessments for foster carers who require a single carer assessment

- 3.1** There will be situations when foster carers who have been approved as a couple will require a new assessment as a single carer – this may be through the breakdown of a relationship or due to bereavement. If a foster carer wishes to continue to foster as a single carer then the supervising social worker should aim to have a household review within 3 months. There may need to be some flexibility in this timescale due to the sensitivity of some situations and this should be agreed with the team manager and the Household Reviewing Officer and recorded on the carers record.
- 3.2** Following a household review a full assessment should be completed within 6 months.

4. Appendix 1 – New Partner Initial Assessment

1. Background Information, which should cover

- Brief details of history of relationship.
- How long couple have known each other.
- Placed child's understanding of the relationship, their views and understanding of this.

2. Knowledge, skills and ability to care for children and young people, which should cover:

- Previous experience of caring for children, including employment, parenting or in a voluntary capacity
- Prospective carer's knowledge and understanding of the issues and situation affecting the children/young people currently in placement.
- Understanding of issues which have led to the child being looked after and the impact this has had on the child's physical and emotional development and behaviour.
- Do the prospective carers have any concerns worries or anxieties about being a part of a fostering family?

3. New partner's lifestyle, which should cover:

- Past and present employment and family other commitments.
- Accommodation - if the new partner is to stay overnight, sleeping arrangements that have been organised.
- Assessment of whether safer caring has been discussed and any risk factors identified and minimised, as far as possible.

4. Current family relationships, which should cover:

- Relationships within the household and within their extended family, including the stability of these.
- What is the new partner's own family's view of the relationship and becoming involved in a fostering household?
- What is the child's relationship with the new partner?
- Does the new partner have any current or history of domestic violence?
- Are there other adults within the new partner's family network who are likely to have regular contact with the child? If so, would these be positive or risky to the child.

Risk Factors

- Social isolation (They need to give names of 2 personal referees).
- Racial conflict and stereotyping (especially if child placed is of a different ethnicity to the foster carer and/or the new partner).
- Family exposed to threats, racism or other harassment.
- Lack of emotional stability.

5. Understanding the looked after child/young person's birth history and relationship with birth parents, which should cover:

- New partner's capacity to have potential understanding regarding to a child in care's birth family, and history.
- Capacity to safeguard the child and understanding of safeguarding issues.

6. Capacity to work with the department, which should cover:

- Understanding of the need to work with the department.
- New partner's understanding of the fostering role and the departments.
- Expectation of them - especially regarding role in fostering home, safer caring, and behaviour management. Potential requirement to attend pre-approval training and expectations on approved carers re training and supervision.
- The requirement following approval to sign a foster carer's agreement and what is included in it.

7. Health, which should cover:

- Whether there are health issues - this includes current or past issues of physical, emotional and mental health, including stress related illnesses, and/or substance misuse.
- If so, how would this affect the new partner's suitability to be in a fostering household?
- Understanding that a full medical will be needed as part of the full assessment and whether they feel this will impact on their approval.

Risk Factors

- Major current or chronic and / or mental health problems

8. Conviction and/or previous involvement with children's social care, which should cover:

- Whether they have any convictions or past/current involvement with the police?
- If so, how will this impact on their suitability to be in a fostering household and vulnerable children and young people.
- DBS check.

- Has any member of the new partner's household had any involvement with children's social care?

Risk Factors

- Offences against children or violent offences will generally rule out adults as suitable to be in a fostering household or approved as foster carers.
- Previous involvement with Children's/Social Services will need to carefully considered.

9. Family History, which should cover:

- New partner's relationships with own parents and siblings (family tree).
- Carer's childhood, including strengths and difficulties from their parents/carers.
- Educational achievements.
- Significant life events.

10. Conclusion and Recommendation, which should cover:

- Analysis as to whether the new partner is an appropriate and safe adult to be a significant adult member of a fostering household.
- Their views and attitude regarding the fostering task and to children in care.
- Child(ren)'s wishes and feelings about the new partner, if already introduced.
- Clear lists of strengths and vulnerabilities of new partner including analysis of risk factors and how they might be minimised through appropriate intervention and support.
- Include potential capacity to meet child(ren)'s physical and educational needs and capacity to promote secure attachments for the child
- View of child's social worker.
- Recommendation.

5. Appendix 2 – Confidentiality Statement

Confidentiality relates to the duty to maintain confidence and respect privacy and it relates to information that we hold about you as well as the children and young people that are in our care.

- All information given about a child who is, or who has been, placed with a foster carer is confidential. This applies equally to information given as part of a written record, passed electronically or given verbally during meetings and discussions concerning the child or family.
- Disclosure of confidential information to someone (e.g. doctor) who has a need to know of that information must be restricted to the information they need.
- Where there is doubt about a person's need for knowledge, advice should be sought from the child's social worker or the foster care service before any information is disclosed.
- No matter concerning a fostered child should be discussed in a public place, under any circumstances whatsoever.

I agree to adhere to the above statements regarding any information that is shared with me, as a prospective foster carer, regarding any child or young person who is in care.

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

6. Appendix 3 – Guidance for updating a Form F or Connected Person’s assessment for when a new partner becomes part of the household

Original Assessment Information

The Foster Carer’s original assessment can usually be used to provide background information on the approved carer, but it is important that if any previous assessment information is used, it is highlighted as such in the new assessment.

For example: ***Source - from original assessment***

Previous Assessor’s View

It must be clear what is the new information, assessment and analysis of this significant change in circumstances. Be wary when updating as the new partner and relationship will change not just the family dynamics but the approved carer’s position and emotional availability and time for the fostering task.

Key Areas to Explore

For each applicant, provide information and evaluate the significance of the applicants – to determine if they are suitable to foster.

Why do they wish to foster?

Is it a case of having to be assessed to satisfy regulations to live in a fostering household? The relationship is a new commitment – this also requires a commitment to fostering. What are their expectations of fostering? Are they open to the required training and support available? Are they accepting of the fostering task? They are joining a family who foster- very different rules apply. Has the new partner had the opportunity to access the Fostering Standards 1.1 – 7.4. Can they work with them?

Enable the prospective carers to talk without prompts, about the Child(ren) in care and their relationship with them. This should give assessors a good indication about their potential suitability as carers.

Family of origin

This includes siblings and other significant family members – what do the new partner’s children/extended family think/know about fostering? Are there children of previous relationships, and if so, what is the impact on them? Do children from previous relationships visit the home? If so, what would be the sleeping arrangements? Seek their references/interview any adult children and analyse what they say about the new partner, their experiences of his/her parenting abilities, the

capacity to parent and their thoughts about fostering - these interviews provide a rich source of evidence about parenting skills.

Couple Relationship

How do they work together and is this conducive to fostering? How will they manage their relationship alongside fostering? What is their view of their relationship and how do they see this developing? Explore the challenges of developing their relationship alongside fostering. If either the present foster carer or prospective carer have previous partners - does this affect their present relationship? Seek references from previous partners and ask how they feel about their children being part of a fostering household. How do they manage contact between children and previous partners - this provides a good source of evidence about ability to work together for the benefit of the children, whether their own or children in care with birth parents.

Diversity

Does the new partner have a different personal, class, racial and ethnic, gender, sexual, cultural, language and religious persuasion identity to the foster carer and the Child(ren) in care? Explore this difference and assess the new partner's attitudes to and experience of diversity. Can they embrace and uphold difference?

Safeguard Checks

Seek references from people who know the new partner well and the approved carer and new partner as a couple.

Fostering Household

Who lives there now? What is the nature of the relationships - the family dynamics and where does the new partner fit into this? What fostering role will they provide? What is the nature and quality of the children of the household's relationship with the new partner? This includes the child(ren) in care - children's wishes and feelings in relation to all prospective carers must be sought - seek their social worker's views, essential if the child(ren) in care has been long term linked to the placement.

Prospective carer's understanding of loss and grief

Do they have an insight into the losses children in care experience? Have they left another set of relationships and experienced loss? Will these feelings be transferred into the fostering household?

Social & Support Network

How has this developed with the new partner? Is there increased support/opportunities for socialising? Family Tree and Ecomap will have changed - show what has developed.

Extra Factors to consider:

Forming new relationships requires the investment of energy and time and the impact of developing relationships on a fostering household need to be reviewed to ensure that the fostering role is not adversely affected.

If the approved carer is experienced - do not make assumptions that despite the new partner hopefully being informed and guided by the existing carer, that this is enough. The existing carer's situation, emotional energy and availability will have changed. It is a time of readjustment for all living in the home and the new couple will need time to establish their new roles, routines and boundaries. The assessing social worker will need to assess this and introduce Skills to Foster and the first fostering modules of training as soon as possible, for the new carer, as well as include them in supervision visits. There is a potential issue in relation to any existing fee level and skills, for example, the existing carer may be an Advanced Carer. Making a joint approval, will approve both at this fee paid level. Does the new partner have the required skills for this level? Can the new partner deal with the most challenging children? Is this appropriate?

Where there are numerous children involved in the placement, we need to consider each child's needs alongside the need for placement together and the additional stresses and joys this brings, alongside the new relationship. Are all individual needs being met?

Working relationship with the supporting social worker – the new assessment will give the opportunity for the social worker to really get to know the new partner and to hopefully establish an open and positive working relationship. This is a new professional relationship and it should not be just informed by the existing working relationship with the approved carer. It is a separate professional relationship. Use as evidence of how the new partner may work in partnership.

How does the new partner view the birth parents/relatives of the child in placement - the Child Care Plan? Do they support any contact arrangements? Can they promote the birth family? This will be even more complex when assessing new partners in kinship households.

If the new partner introduces new children to the fostering household – consider Children's Skills and Outreach Worker input and support.

Evidence

Strengths – what strengths does the new partner bring to the fostering task?

What strengths do they bring as a couple?

Vulnerabilities - what vulnerabilities does the new partner have in terms of fostering?

What plans are in place to combat this? For example, area for further development - identify training/support groups/buddying up etc.

Conclusion

Undertaking new partner assessments requires an informed knowledge on the assessment process and the fostering household, a clear focus on what is required and a confidence about what it is important to explore, assess and analyse. It requires a sensitive, evidence-based approach.