**Procedures and Guidance for changes within the Fostering Household**

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# **About This Document**

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| 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** |
| Updated by  | **Linda Leeder - Fostering Panel Adviser** |
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# **Version Control**

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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** |
| July 2023 | **2.2** | **Policy reviewed and revised**  | **Linda Leeder** |

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# Introduction

* 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.
	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.”
	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.
	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.

# Fostering Procedure - New Partners

* 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.
* A Confidentiality Statement should be signed by the new partner (see Appendix 1).
* 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, with the carer and new partner, 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.

## 2.4 Stage 3 - New partner moves into foster home.

* Supervising social worker progresses updated Fostering Assessment 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 the Fostering Assessment or Connected Persons assessment.
* A Household Review should be undertaken to include the new partner.
* Skills to Foster training and Fostering in a Modern World to be completed, if not done so already.
* Process of approval in line with the Recruitment and Assessment Policy.
* First Household Review; should be returned to the fostering panel and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker within 12 months of being approved as a couple, as a first review following approval.

See additional Guidance of key issues to be explored when updating a Fostering Assessment/ Connected Person Assessment to include a new partner (*Appendix 2*).

# Updated assessments for foster carers who require a single carer assessment

* 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.
	2. Following a household review a ‘Single to joint’ assessment should be completed within 6 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. The assessment should be presented at panel be the revision of approval agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.

# Appendix 1 – 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 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix 2 – Guidance for updating a Fostering Assessment 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. Statutory Check form to be completed.

**Safer Caring**

Discussions with the applicant about how they can keep the children safe as a couple and how they can keep themselves safe.

**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.

**Adult life, including employment and other significant events in their life**

It is helpful to understand how they have overcome significant events in their life as it demonstrates resilience, use of their support networks, seeking help and working with professionals to provide the best care for the children they care for. How will they fit in the extra responsibilities of fostering/parenting into their life and work life; they will need to think about writing logs, attending, and contributing to meetings and attending and completing training, for example.

**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?

**Attachment, trauma, resilience and secure base model**

The applicant will need to understand how to care for children with complex traumas and behaviours. What would they find challenging; what would trigger strong reactions in them and how would they manage this. How would they as a couple know that they were struggling with a certain behaviour or situation. How would the couple work together to support each other in this

**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.