



CALDECOTT FOSTERING – RECRUITMENT AND FORM F ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers statutory guidance asserts that no one has the right to be a foster carer. Fostering decisions must focus on the best interests of the child. At Caldecott Fostering we also recognise that we need foster carers with a broad range of experience and diversity to reflect the needs and experiences of the children we care for. At Caldecott Fostering we strive for the highest possible standards with children at the centre of all that we do. Alongside this we provide robust training and support to enable our foster carers to provide the highest possible standards of care for our children.

Underpinning this is a strong and embedded therapeutic approach. Foster carers will be introduced to this at the beginning of their journey and this therapeutic thread runs throughout all training, support and supervision.

Caldecott Fostering uses a Relational Model of Care to achieve the agency's vision of enabling young people to build a future through reparative nurturing and growth by promoting relationships.

Our consistent approach supports foster carers, staff and children to:

- Understand themselves better
- Acknowledge that their experiences have influence on them now
- Engage in education/training/development
- Accept that people need care and support
- Verbalise/appropriately communicate feelings and needs
- Develop safe, trusting growth promoting therapeutic relationships with adults and children
- Invest in and value relationships; repair and heal ruptures when they occur

Our model addresses the common difficulties that many of the children and young people in care share, whilst holding in mind that they are all individuals with a unique set of experiences and needs. We do not solely focus on the difficulties the children and young people may have. We acknowledge the strengths, resilience, courage and tenacity they possess and the potential within them. Our model of care seeks to support and promote development in these areas.

Our Relational model is an approach; providing a therapeutic framework and a set of values to inform interactions and decision-making processes, whilst still allowing for and encouraging creativity and innovation by all who work within it.

Our Model of Care heavily draws on the concept and importance of a Secure Base (Bowlby 1988) and of Trauma Informed Practices (Dan Hughes (2012) & Steele & Malchiodi (2012)).



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Our therapy team provides support to our foster carers, staff and children to enable all to apply the Relational Model of Care. This enables us to think together about what is going on behind the behaviour and how through relationships these can be changed or adapted.

The Form F assessment is the starting point of the foster carers' journey. Whilst we need to be confident in the applicants' basic fostering capacity and their ability to safeguard, we also need to be confident in their ability to learn, grow and develop in their role.

This Form F Assessment Framework aims to outline the standards and expectations of the Form F assessment process with Caldecott Fostering. It offers best practice resources and a step-by-step guide to the key components of the Caldecott Fostering Form F Assessment process.

2. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 – this legislation regulates all fostering services, replacing the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/581/contents/made>

Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013. This guidance amends the assessment and approval process, and includes guidance on the usual fostering limit, terminations of approval and the IRM. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275764/20130522statutory_guidanceassessment_and_approval_of_foster_carers_final.pdf

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards – Standard 13 Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children. These NMS provide a clear framework for Fostering Service Providers, Foster Carers and associated workers in respect of how fostering services should be delivered, how foster carers should be assessed, what foster carers can expect to receive by way of support. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>



3. ENQUIRIES AND INITIAL VISITS

Prospective Foster Carers must be made to feel welcomed and valued by Caldecott Fostering. An enquiry from a prospective foster carer may be received by telephone, internet, in person, email or letter. All enquirers will be treated with respect and fairness and given a prompt response. They will be contacted to gather further information and for a general discussion about fostering. An initial enquiry form will be completed with all prospective foster carers to obtain basic preliminary information, which will be uploaded to the agency's information system Charms.

The initial enquiry form will record the detail of the potential foster carer(s) which must include:

- Full name, date of birth, address and telephone number;
- Any other addresses within the last 5 years;
- Date of request;
- Details of current and any previous marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship;
- Names of other members in household and their ages;
- Details of their accommodation, including available bedrooms for foster children;
- Previous experience and details of any other approvals already given;
- Type of fostering sought (short-term, long-term, number of children, ages etc.);
- The outcome of any request or application made by them or any other member of the household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early years provider.

If at this point the decision is made that they meet the essential criteria for foster carers (see Section 4), an initial home visit will be undertaken. If the person enquiring wants more information at this stage, they will be directed to our website and if they wish to proceed to home visit this will be arranged and the date will be confirmed with them. Where the enquiry relates to a couple, both will need to be available for the initial home visit which will take place as soon as possible. If there are any concerns or complexities as a result of the information gathered through this initial enquiry call, then the Registered Manager or a Social Worker should be consulted before proceeding to an initial home visit.

If the person enquiring is already an approved foster carer for another Independent Fostering Agency or they foster with the local authority, an initial enquiry form and initial home visit will still need to be completed.

4. CRITERIA FOR FOSTER CARERS

4.1 Individual and Joint

Applications will be considered from married couples, civil partners, unmarried couples or single people.

4.2 Religion

Applications will be considered from people of any or no religious persuasion.



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4.3 Ethnicity

Applications will be considered from people of any race or culture.

4.4 Age

The minimum age for foster carers is generally 21 years but Caldecott Fostering only seeks to approve individuals as foster carers where they are at least 25 years old. There is no specific upper age limit.

4.5 Gender

Applications will be considered from all people whatever their gender identity.

4.6 Sexual Orientation

Applications will be considered from people of any sexual orientation.

4.7 Income and Work Commitment

Applicants may be in work or not. However Caldecott Fostering will consider the specific needs of the service at the time and expects that applicants are able to demonstrate how they would be able to prioritise the needs of the child and the fostering role.

4.8 Health

Applicants will be required to have a full medical and undergo any further tests/checks that may be required by the Fostering Panel's Medical Adviser. The Medical Adviser will advise on the applicants' ability, from a health point of view, to meet the needs of a child who is fostered. Any comments or advice given by the Medical Adviser must be taken seriously by the applicants and will be addressed during the assessment process.

Applicants are expected to positively promote a healthy lifestyle which will enable a child to reach their full potential. This would encompass attention to nutrition, exercise, routine and hygiene.

It is expected that foster carers will comply with nationally recommended alcohol consumption levels and that children's needs and safety will be met at all times.

4.9 Criminal Convictions

A person who is seeking approval as a foster carer will not be considered if they or any adult member of the household is within the category of Disqualified Persons (Foster Carer) - (see Section 7.1 Checks and References Framework)

Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In all such cases a risk assessment will be prepared and referred to the Registered Manager who may also consult the Responsible Individual or Agency Decision Maker regarding suitability.

4.10 Accommodation

Applicants may own their own home or live in rented accommodation. Where applicants live in rented accommodation, they will need to seek permission from their landlord to foster and a reference from the landlord will be sought.



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Applicants will need living and sleeping accommodation appropriate to the number and ages of the children they are seeking to foster. They must be able to offer separate bedrooms for each foster child. Only in exceptional circumstances would sharing bedrooms be allowed and this would NEVER be with adults or sons or daughters of the foster carer.

It is important that the home environment is child-friendly, welcoming to children, safe and meets reasonable levels of hygiene.

All applicants will have a safety check on their home undertaken by the assessor. This will include the outdoor space, animals (including the sleeping and toileting arrangements for any pet) and the holding of any firearms.

4.11 Driving

The expectation of Caldecott Fostering is that the main foster carer drives and has a car available at all times. All enquirers must be prepared to facilitate family time between any foster child and his or her parents and significant family members.

5. FORM F ASSESSMENT PROCESS – STAGE 1

Stage one of the assessment process is intended to provide the agency with basic information about the applicant to enable clearly unsuitable applicants to be sifted out without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource by both the agency and the applicant. More detailed information is collected in the assessment - Stage 2 (see section 9).

Where a person applies to become a foster carer by way of an application form and it is decided to assess their suitability, the following information must be obtained as soon as reasonably practicable relating to the applicant and other members of their household and family:

- Full name, address and date of birth;
- Details of health (supported by a medical report);
- Particulars of any other adult members of the household;
- Particulars of the children in the family, whether or not members of the household, and any other children in the household;
- Particulars of their accommodation;
- The outcome of any request or application made by them or any other member of their household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early years provider including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval relating to them or to any other member of the household;
- If the applicant has, in the preceding twelve months, been a foster parent approved by another fostering service provider, the name and address of that fostering service provider;
- Names and addresses of two persons who will provide personal references;



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- In relation to the applicant and any other member of the applicant's household who is aged 18 or over, an enhanced criminal record certificate;
- Details of current, and any previous, marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship;
- The views of, the local authority in whose area the applicant lives, if different;
- Where the applicant has previously been, or is currently, approved as a foster carer by another fostering service provider, or as a prospective adopter by an adoption Agency, and consents, access may be requested to the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider/ adoption Agency in relation to the applicant. That service/Agency must provide access within 15 working days of a request being received.
- All references and checks as outlined in Section 7 Checks and References Framework

Where, having regard to any information obtained in Stage 1 above, it is decided (by the Agency Decision Maker) that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, the applicant must be notified in writing with reasons. This notification may be given whether or not all of this information has been obtained. Such a notification may not be given more than 10 working days after all the information has been obtained. The applicant has no right to make representations about the decision or to have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism. However, the applicant must be informed that they can complain via the Caldecott Fostering Complaints process if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled. The complaints process should address whether or not the applicant's case has been handled in a reasonable way, rather than the question of the applicant's suitability to foster.

Where all the specified information has been obtained and notification has not been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable, then the application must proceed to assessment - stage two.

Stages One and Two of the assessment process may be carried out concurrently, but the Stage One information must be sought as soon as possible and the decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed stage one must be made within ten working days of all the information required in that stage being received.

In accordance with National Minimum Standard 14.4, the Fostering Panel must make its recommendation on the application within eight months of the applicant first applying to be assessed, although all efforts will be made to complete the assessment process sooner.

Applicants are also required to enter into a written agreement with Caldecott Fostering stating that the information that they have provided is true, and that they are aware that their failure to comply with this agreement will lead to the refusal of their application.

The Registered Manager will allocate the prospective carers to a social worker who will undertake the full assessment of the application. The applicants will also be invited to attend the Foster Carers Preparation/Training Course (see Section 8).



6. SHARING INFORMATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF FOSTERING ASSESSMENTS

Where the applicant has been a foster carer within the preceding 12 months and was approved as such by another fostering service provider, a reference must be requested from that other fostering service provider.

There is no requirement to also interview personal referees (see below). However, additional verbal and/or written references **may** be sought from personal referees. If the previous fostering service, for whatever reason, does not provide a reference, interviews with two personal referees **must** be conducted.

Records compiled by another fostering service, or an adoption Agency, can be used to inform the new assessment of the applicant's suitability to foster. For instance, if previous partners have been interviewed in the past to verify facts, and the current assessing social worker is satisfied with the records in respect of these interviews, it should not be necessary to repeat the interviews if no further information is required. The assessing social worker should, however, satisfy themselves as to the quality and continuing relevance of the information before using it to inform the current assessment.

Information that should be shared, upon request, in order to inform a new assessment of a person's suitability to foster or adopt includes:

- The report of the original assessment of the person's suitability to foster or adopt (if it is considered by the body requesting the information to be recent enough to be relevant);
- A copy of the report of the last review of the individual's continuing suitability to foster or adopt and any other review report considered useful to understanding the person's current suitability to foster or adopt;
- Details of any concerns about standards of practice and what if anything is being done/has been done to address them;
- Details of allegations made against the foster carer/adopter or their household members; and
- Any other information considered to be relevant to the assessment of the person's suitability to foster/adopt.

Information should only be shared with the informed, explicit consent of all parties referred to in the information, including young people where they have sufficient understanding to consent to the sharing of their information (if they do not have sufficient understanding, the consent of a person with Parental Responsibility would need to be obtained). This means that the person giving consent needs to understand why their information is to be shared, what will be shared, who will see their information, the purpose to which it will be put and the implications of sharing that information.



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If consent is refused, the current fostering service or adoption agency should consider whether there is any information in the records that is a cause for concern. Any information about an enquirer's conduct or suitability to foster/adopt that has caused concern should be shared even if the individual has refused consent. If there are no such concerns, and the individual has refused consent, information should not be shared. This may require documents to be redacted to remove information relating to individuals who have refused consent.

Requests for access to information must be accompanied by the written consent of the enquirer to the sharing of their information.

The receiving service should acknowledge the request within two working days, seek consent from all others referred to in the information within five working days and the information, redacted where necessary, should be provided within fifteen working days.

7. CHECK AND REFERENCES FRAMEWORK

Checks and references are the cornerstone of the Form F Framework as these will underpin the information gathered as part of the assessment. Undertaking checks and references is not only about safeguarding it also constitutes an essential element in ensuring that children are not placed with potential abusers. Fostering assessments also need to be genuinely investigative and should triangulate information rather than simply accept self-reporting of applicants. Assessments need to include information from a wide range of sources, independently verified wherever possible, and a series of thorough checks and references will offer that. Checks and references can also be a valuable source of positive evidence of fostering capacity and this evidence should also be incorporated into the assessment.

Caldecott Fostering carries out comprehensive checks on prospective foster carers. These checks are carried out in the spirit of honesty and transparency and the checks process will have been discussed with prospective foster carers during the initial enquiry and initial visit stages. Consent to checks will be obtained in the application process. If information emerges during the assessment that requires further checks, the Registered Manager should be notified immediately.

Caldecott Fostering will arrange for the following checks to be made on all members of the household aged 18 and over: Disclosure and Barring Service, Probation, Health Trust, Education, Children's Services and adult (including the List of Children with a Child Protection Plan) and the NSPCC, current and previous 20 years Local Authority, current employers/voluntary work and previous employers/voluntary work if this related to children or vulnerable adults (this includes OFSTED for Childminding), mortgage/landlord check, SSAFA, ex-partners, financial assessment, children and overseas checks, and whether the applicants have a right to work in the UK. Where the applicants live or have lived outside the local authority area, the checks must be made with the local authority and health trust where the applicants live/have lived. These checks should be



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recorded including the date when the checks were made and more details about these and other checks is given below.

Caldecott Fostering administrative staff will arrange for the checks outlined below and Caldecott Fostering will fund the cost of all checks relating to the fostering application.

7.1 DBS Checks

Under Regulation 26(1A) and Schedule 3, Part 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations (2011) Caldecott Fostering is required to complete enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for the applicant/s and for any other household members aged eighteen or over. A new DBS check may not be necessary if the individual has subscribed to the [Disclosure and Barring Service Update Service](#).

This check is to enable assessing social workers to consider any criminal convictions, cautions or other information held by the police that raise issues of concern. There is no legal requirement to undertake DBS checks in relation to adults at other addresses, but in certain circumstances this is permitted and might be deemed good practice.

Applicants must be made aware at the point of application that any criminal history may impact on recommendations about their suitability to foster. They should be informed that this will be discussed as part of the assessment and that any cautions or convictions should be shared at the point of application.

A person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer for the agency (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of a specified offence committed at the age of 18 or over. [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

A specified offence is defined as an offence against a child*, an offence specified in [Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011](#), the importation/possession of indecent photographs of a child under 16 and any other offence which involves bodily injury to a child (other than common assault or battery).

*A list of these offences is set out in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, except that it does not include an offence contrary to section 9 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sexual activity with a child) where the offender was under 20 when the offence was committed and the child was aged 13 or over.

In addition, a person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer for the agency (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of an offence specified in paragraph 1 of part 2 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 committed at the age of 18 or over OR falls within paragraph 2 or 3 of Part 2 of Schedule 4, notwithstanding that the offences listed have been repealed.



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Where Disclosure and Barring Service checks reveal that an applicant for approval as a foster carer is a disqualified person, the applicants must be advised that their application cannot proceed. This must be confirmed in writing to them, together with the reasons, and retained with their application form.

Caldecott Fostering use Atlantic Data online DBS service. The applicant/s is required to produce the identity evidence required by the DBS (and as set out in DBS guidance). The assessing social worker or other Caldecott specified person will be required to check this evidence and record the relevant information online. The applicant is then contacted via the DBS online to complete the second part of the application.

Once the check has been processed a DBS certificate will be issued and sent directly to the applicant only. No copy is sent to Caldecott Fostering; however Caldecott Fostering will be notified that this has been issued and whether it contains any information. The applicant is required to produce that certificate to the agency so the agency can record the relevant details of the certificate and verify the DBS certificate number and date of issue. Should a DBS certificate contain information with regard to past offences, then Caldecott Fostering will consider those and undertake a risk assessment to determine whether the applicant remains suitable to foster in light of those offences. It is a regulatory requirement that all convictions and cautions are recorded within the Form F no matter how minor or dated.

Caldecott Fostering undertake a DBS check every 3 years as a minimum. Caldecott Fostering use the DBS update service. This means that once the initial DBS certificate or subsequent DBS certificate has been issued the applicant/approved foster carer is then invited to register with the DBS update service within 19 days. (They may claim this cost back via their expenses). Thereafter the DBS check will be performed annually (or at any other time) and recorded by the agency as having taken place.

Data Protection Responsibilities

Caldecott Fostering is required to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the DBS Revised Code of Practice, 2015 which means:

- The original DBS certificate that is sent to the applicant, is not retained by Caldecott Fostering or copied in full but rather the relevant information is extracted and recorded in the assessment report.
- Relevant information will include the date of the check, the certificate number and any convictions or cautions that are indicated.
- Information from a DBS certificate should not be shared with any other person including the applicant's partner without their explicit and written consent.
- The information on the applicant's case record should only be retained for as long as it is relevant, subject to the requirements discussed below:

Statutory guidance regarding fostering:



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A record must be kept in relation to each foster carer covering the carers assessment and approval, children placed and other matters as set out in Regulation 30. The records must be kept for at least 10 years after the foster carer's approval ends. There is also a requirement to keep records relating to people who do not go on to be approved foster carers and to retain these records for three years.

Interpreting information from DBS checks

Given the range of possible offences and the many sets of circumstances in which they may have occurred it is unhelpful to be prescriptive about the judgements that will be made but a number of factors will be considered such as:

- The offence itself and how relevant it is to caring for children
- When the offence happened and whether there is a pattern of offending
- The applicant's reflections about the offending and their subsequent behaviour
- How the applicant's attitudes and behaviour may impact on any children who might be placed in their care
- Whether there are opportunities for the applicant to address any current or unacceptable behaviour and their willingness to do this
- The strengths that the applicant might have and the extent to which these might outweigh any concerns arising from the information in the check
- Other particulars of the individual case that might make the applicant suitable to be approved particularly in relation to caring for a relative or friend

Decisions must be proportionate and child-centred and the facts on which the analysis and conclusions are based must be properly documented and recorded in the applicant's case record and authorised by the Registered Manager. Any reason not to proceed must be clearly explained to the applicant and they should be given the right to respond.

Where the DBS contains information about cautions or convictions, it is important not to assume that the applicant's partner or other members of the household are aware of this. Where it becomes clear to the agency that the information about convictions or cautions has not been shared between partners, the assessor/Caldecott Fostering should ask the person with the conviction or caution why this is so. Failure to share such information with a partner should be explored and will lead to further discussion and considerations, irrespective of the content of the DBS check itself. It is possible that refusal to share such information might indicate a lack of trust and openness in the relationship especially if they remain reluctant to do so after they have been counselled by their practitioner.

In no circumstances will Caldecott Fostering share information without the individual's explicit written consent and where the individual is unwilling to share the information, the applicants should be told that the outcome of the criminal record check prevents their application proceeding, but without providing any detail about the offence or offences.



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Checks for non-family members living in the household:

An enhanced DBS check must be undertaken on all persons in the household including non-family members, 18 years and over, including any adult under a 'Staying Put Scheme' and where an adult is living in the home under a 'Parent and Child' fostering scheme.

Children in the household:

A DBS check can only be undertaken of a child 16 and 17 years old if they are involved in 'regulated activity', and they must be able to give informed consent.

Regular Visitors support carers adult children:

It is not legally permissible to undertake DBS checks on non-household members who are not involved in 'regulated activity'.

Regulated Activity

Regulated activity relates to the persons **'who have care and supervision of children, if carried out by the same person frequently, (once a week or more often) or, on four or more days, in a 30-day period or overnight, and this care is unsupervised'**. Caldecott Fostering has discretion in this regard, taking into account the opportunity to delegate authority to foster carers to make judgements of this nature.

7.2 Local Authority Checks

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require that the views of the local authority where the applicant lives are taken into account.

Whilst there is no legal requirement to undertake local authority checks in relation to previous addresses, given the important information that is held by local authorities, there are strong arguments to suggest that pursuing local authority checks going back many years is entirely proportionate and constitutes a good use of time and resources. Local authority checks may provide information that cannot be obtained from other checks such as child protection plans, children in need information, referrals to mental health and drug and alcohol services.

Therefore, Caldecott Fostering, require local authority checks to be undertaken on all household members, covering all addresses that go back **20 years**. Where there are concerns checks can go back further if needed. Where the applicant is care experienced, checks must be carried out in the local authority area they were looked after in. If an applicant has parented a child at a previous address, this must be checked regardless of the timeframe. Local authority checks should also be carried out on non-resident partners.

7.3 Personal References



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Regulation 26 (1A) and schedule 3, Part 1, of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require that the assessor interviews at least 2 persons nominated by the prospective foster carer and prepares a written summary of the information provided. (Please note this does not apply where the applicant has been a foster parent in the last 12 months – please see guidance in Section 5).

The expectations about personal references will have been discussed with applicants at the initial home visit. Caldecott Fostering require **four written references** as part the application to foster which will then be followed up by a face-to-face interview. Two of which, can be from family members and two from non-family members. Where a couple is applying to foster, some of their referees must know them as a couple, as well as individually, and able to comment on their relationship. Where this is not possible additional references may be required.

Ideally referees will have known the applicants well over long periods of time and will be in a position to talk about their interaction with children. Caldecott Fostering require that at least one of the referees should have known the applicants for 5 years, and all referees more than 2 years. Caldecott Fostering reserve the right to request further referees if deemed necessary. The assessor should work closely with the applicants in deciding who is best to fulfil these referee roles. What matters most, is that references offer a detailed and in-depth picture of the real person, allowing the assessor to compare this with the picture the applicants paint of themselves. Should the applicants and assessor disagree about the most suitable referees the assessor will refer to the Registered Manager.

Personal referees are a valuable source of 3rd party information for a number of reasons and they provide the assessor with the opportunity to test out their analysis of the applicants ensuring that they have an accurate picture. Whilst the assessor is not permitted to share information disclosed by applicants as part of the assessment process, personal referees will often share their knowledge of the applicant and information can be triangulated.

Referees should be encouraged to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings in respect of an applicant. Caldecott Fostering works under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and this legislation sets out exemptions from some of the rights and obligations in some circumstances. Under these exemptions, all references provided to Caldecott Fostering are considered confidential and will not be shared with the prospective foster carer unless Caldecott Fostering receive specific instruction from the referee to do so. Therefore, referees can be reassured that their reference can be given 'in confidence' and will not be disclosed to the applicant. However, the reference may be shared with Local Authorities or other official bodies to comply with our legal obligations under the Fostering Regulations, the Children Act 1989 or any other statute, under which we are regulated. All references have the words "In Confidence" in the document header to make it clear that the information contained therein will not be shared, should the applicant(s) make a Subject Access Request.

Caldecott Fostering reserves the right to request references from other individuals in the applicant's support network/families, where the information gathered could assist in compiling a full picture of their circumstances.



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All adult children should be interviewed face to face as they are a rich source of evidence. If they live abroad, they should be invited to supply a written reference and a possible follow up telephone call/virtual meeting undertaken with the assessor.

Once referees are identified and agreed, referees will be contacted in writing explaining the purpose of the reference with the reference pro-forma enclosed. They will be asked to return this completed and signed. Where referees are unable to complete the written document, scribing support will be offered by Caldecott Fostering to support the referee.

The assessor will make arrangements to interview the referees and write a report. The interviewer must confirm the referee's identity, seek confirmation from them that they wrote the written reference and confirm the contents and accuracy of this. The referee must also be asked directly if they have any concerns (safeguarding or otherwise) about the applicant(s). It is recommended that assessors refer to the latest version of the guide *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment by Roger Chapman (2021)* which outlines suggested areas to cover in a personal referee interview. The assessing social worker should also ensure that the interview is planned around themes and issues identified within the assessment which the assessor feels they need to test out and explore with the referee. Any points from the written reference which require further clarity or exploration should also be covered. This report should conclude with an analysis section.

Following the interview, a copy of the interview summary should be shared with the referee so that they can sign to confirm that this is an accurate record. This should not include the analysis.

Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference and ensure access to the files is arranged to allow the assessing social worker to read the files and take that information into account in their assessment of the applicant (additionally see section 6).

The material from referees will be presented in the assessment report in Form F, section C with notes clearly stating who was seen, or what information has been withheld, due to confidentiality.

7.4 Health/Medicals

Regulation 26(1A) and Schedule 3, part 1 para 2 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require details of the foster carers' health supported by a medical report. Foster carers must be in good physical, mental and emotional health in order to be able to cope with the challenges of caring for children who have experienced adverse life experiences and are required to complete a medical with their GP which is subsequently provided to the agency Medical Advisor.

In considering the health of prospective foster carers, advice in relation to specific conditions is set out below. Mather and Lehner (2010) helpfully suggest three overarching principles:

- ☐ The welfare of the child is paramount



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- ☐ Parenting capacities are more important than perfect health
- ☐ Honesty and openness in dealing with applicants is essential

Decisions about suitability to foster should always take into account the need for foster carers, particularly for older children, sibling groups and black and minority ethnic children, disabled children and children with other special needs. Whilst the health of a prospective carer is hugely important it needs to be considered in terms of the overall quality of family life that could be offered to a child.

Furthermore, in many cases it is a couple not an individual who come forward to be considered as carers. Social workers and others need to carefully consider the illogical situation of rejecting as unsuitable, a healthy well motivated applicant, because of health problems in their partner. Where one partner has significant health risks, the assessment must focus on the motivation and abilities of both partners and take into account their support networks.

It is absolutely essential that there is scrupulous openness and honesty in dealing with all applicants. Individuals whose application has been turned down have a right to know the grounds for this meaning that “off the record” conversations with GP’s or others are entirely inappropriate. At the same time, if a health assessment reveals a previously unsuspected poor prognosis, careful consideration needs to be given to how this is best communicated and by whom.

The Caldecott Fostering Medical Advisor will write a summary report which outlines any health issues that the assessing social worker needs to be aware of and explore in the assessment and will offer advice about health risks. The Medical Advisor report should form part of the assessment. This report should take into account

- Medical history
- Current health
- Health related lifestyle issues
- Any health concerns

The Medical Advisor may also wish to seek further information from specialists or consultants. In light of the findings of the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (2022) undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership into the death of Leiland-James Michael Corkill, any current or historic providers of mental health treatment or support will be routinely contacted to gain further information. Specific consent must be obtained from the applicant in relation to this.

It is essential that the assessing social worker addresses any issues raised within the medical advice sensitively with the applicant(s). Where there are chronic or life limiting conditions, it is important to be mindful that applicants are sometimes not aware of the full details of their prognosis. Where this is the case, this will clearly have implications for the assessment process and where there are concerns, discussions should take place with the Registered Manager. It must not be assumed that individual applicants are aware of each other’s medical information and any issues must be discussed with them individually in the first instance.



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Where applicants have diagnosed health conditions, they should be explored holistically within the assessment with a focus on how the condition will impact on their role as a foster carer, support networks and what health promotion may improve their health.

It is essential that assessing social workers do not attempt to interpret medical information and therefore close working with the agency and agency medical advisor is crucial. The assessing social worker is responsible for the overall recommendation regarding suitability and this should be informed by medical advice, however recommendations should not be based solely on this.

7.5 Specific Health Conditions

7.5.1 Obesity – Obesity should only be used to deem an applicant unsuitable in the most extreme cases where it is likely to adversely impact on a child in their care. In reaching judgements about overweight or obese carers, the assessing social worker should consider:

- Is the applicant physically capable of undertaking the responsibilities associated with competent childcare?
- Will the applicant provide a healthy diet for a child in their family and promote a lifestyle in which the child experiences healthy physical activity?
- Is the applicant likely to be alive and in reasonable health for the duration of the child's minority and early adult life?

7.5.2 Treated Cancer – It is important that the Medical Advisor has obtained detailed information from the applicant's consultant. It is generally accepted that an individual should have completed all treatment and be back to full activities for a reasonable period of time before making an application to foster.

7.5.3 Blood Borne Virus Infection - Blood-borne infections (BBI) are caused by microorganisms (viruses or bacteria) that are carried in blood and cause disease in people. Given that HIV and to a lesser degree Hepatitis, are associated with stigma, discrimination and exclusion, information sharing can be challenging. General principles about this are outlined by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008) but it may be necessary to take advice in individual circumstances. CoramBAAF 2021 Practice Note 76, also offers advice on the screening and management of children and carers who have, or are at risk of, a blood borne infection. Urine, faeces, saliva, sputum, tears, sweat and vomit do not carry a risk of HIV, HBV or HCV infection, unless they are visibly contaminated with blood. These diseases are not transmitted by social contact and daily activities, e.g. coughing, sneezing, kissing, holding hands, or sharing bathrooms, swimming pools, toilets, food, cups, cutlery and crockery. Provided safe care procedures are followed, there is negligible risk to children cared for in the homes of carers with HIV, HCV or HBV.

7.5.4 Mental Health – Whilst the applicants' mental health should be considered holistically, the applicant's functioning and ability to parent a child who has had adverse early life experiences

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should be the focus of the assessment. The assessing social worker should bear in mind the challenges of parenting children with complex histories including trauma and loss when completing their assessment. Using prescribed medication should not be a determining factor in itself, and someone who is stable and functioning well on a long-term medication may cope very well with parenting. It is not necessary for applicants to have discontinued antidepressants or other medication, to be considered suitable to foster. It will of course be necessary to ensure safe storage of medication within the home.

As noted above, in light of the findings of the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (2022) undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership into the death of Leiland-James Michael Corkill, any current or historic providers of mental health treatment or support will be routinely contacted to gain further information.

In conjunction with medical advice, the assessing social worker should consider:

- Precipitating factors
- Course of the illness and response to treatment
- Prognosis
- How does the mental health condition impact on the adult in day-to-day life and how would this impact on a child living with them?
- If the mental health condition is episodic how might that impact on the child?
- Where the adult is currently well what is the history/likelihood of relapse. How is this recognised and treated and what are the implications of that for the child?
- Self-awareness of the applicant of their own mental health
- The impact of stress - might the stress of caring for a traumatised or challenging child contribute to an episode of ill health or a relapse?
- What support is available to help the applicant manage their mental health?

7.5.5 Smoking and Lifestyle

Smoking – CoramBAAF Practice Note 68 (2018) offers guidance and advice on smoking and the use of E-Cigarettes. The dangers from smoking are widely recognised and there is much evidence of the harmful effects on children in smoking households including respiratory disease, asthma attacks, cot deaths and middle ear infections. Children living with smokers are also more likely to take up smoking as adolescents. Caldecott Fostering encourages all foster carers to cease smoking and any applicants in assessment should be advised about the health risks of smoking and second-hand smoking

Caldecott Fostering policy is that a looked after child should not be matched or move in with foster carers who smoke if:

- The child is under five years
- The child is disabled or where a lack of mobility makes them more susceptible to the risks of second-hand smoke
- The child has respiratory disease, heart disease or glue ear
- The child is from a non-smoking family



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Carers who do smoke should take action to minimise children's exposure to smoke. Caldecott Fostering requires foster carers to smoke outside of the foster home minimising children's exposure to second-hand smoke. Foster carers should also smoke out of sight of children and be aware of the issue of appropriate role modelling to children. Applicants or foster carers who have successfully given up smoking should not be deemed non-smokers until they have given up successfully for at least 12 months.

E-cigarettes and Vaping – Electronic cigarettes, also known as vaporisers, are not tobacco cigarettes. They are nicotine delivery systems that do not contain tobacco. Public Health England reports published in 2015 and updated in 2018 (McNeill et al, 2015, 2018) concluded that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful than tobacco, whilst acknowledging that they are not completely risk-free products. However, concerns do remain about the use and impact of e-cigarettes and these must be taken into consideration in the context of fostering.

- Liquid Nicotine is highly toxic and care should be taken to store this safely and appropriately
- The long-term safety of E-cigarettes has not yet been established
- Foster carers using E-cigarettes will role model smoking behaviour and that may increase the likelihood of children using these products. Therefore, if foster carers or other family members are using e-cigarettes, they are advised to do so only when children (of all ages) are not present. Ideally, foster carers will not be using e-cigarettes.

Alcohol – With reference to the current government guidelines for alcohol consumption, the assessing social worker should consider:

- Does the applicant drink so excessively that at times their behaviour becomes unacceptable to others?
- Is there any medical evidence that alcohol consumption is having an adverse impact on health?
- Is the applicant likely to be alive and in reasonable health for the duration of the child's minority and adult life?
- Is the applicant dependent on alcohol or is alcohol so important in the applicant's life that this affects work and relationships and is routinely prioritised over other leisure activities?
- Social habits should be explored as part of personal reference discussions
- Is the applicant aware of how alcohol use might be perceived by a child particularly if substance misuse had occurred in the birth family?
- Would the prospective foster carer be open to drinking less or abstaining for the child's benefit if necessary?
- Is there any suggestion that alcohol is used as an unhealthy coping mechanism since we know that caring for looked after children can be very challenging and stressful?

Alongside self-reported information, broader checks and references may indicate alcohol misuse and any information arising from these should be considered as part of this discussions.



7.6 Health and Safety/Health and Safety Checks

[The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Regulations 2011](#) require fostering services to make available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy nurturing environment. Caldecott Fostering requires foster homes to be safe, secure, provide a comfortable environment for children and protect children from harm or risk of harm.

To enable this process and as part of the foster carer assessment and approval process, Caldecott Fostering needs to be satisfied that their foster carers provide suitable accommodation which is safe and nurturing in order to care for the children and young people they support. The assessing social worker is required to complete a Caldecott Fostering Health and Safety checklist during the assessment process.

This checklist will be updated as part of the annual review of approved foster carers. The Health and Safety checklist will be updated when any structural work, or changes to the existing property are made. If applicants/foster carers move home then a new Health and Safety checklist will be completed.

Assessing Social Workers are required to complete any recommendations and actions following the completed Health and Safety assessment with prospective foster carers prior to them being presented to the Fostering Panel.

Key areas are outlined in the sections below. In addition see separate Health and Safety Policy for further detailed information.

https://www.proceduresonline.com/caldecott/fost/p_health_safety.html

7.6.1 Fire Precautions

Smoke alarms should be fitted on every level in the foster home. Many smoke alarms are connected to mains electricity or fitted with a 10-year battery sealed in device that bleeps when they need replacing. If an alarm is fitted with a standard battery this should be changed annually and the whole unit replaced 10 yearly because the sensor may deteriorate over time.

Government guidance states that fire alarms should be tested monthly and Caldecott Fostering expects foster carers to ensure they do this and record they have done so. The Health & Safety assessment undertaken by the assessing social worker will record the satisfactory instalment of smoke alarms.

Fire Safety Plans - Standard 3.2 of the Training, Support and Development Standards for fostering requires those living in a foster home to know what to do in the event of a fire. This is most often addressed through the production of a household fire safety plan. This is completed by the assessing social worker and the foster carers during the assessment and Caldecott Fostering is responsible for monitoring this plan and ensuring that foster carers keep it up to date. Caldecott Fostering expect that this plan is shared with and explained to all foster children living in the home



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and supervising social workers through supervision are responsible for ensuring that this has taken place.

There are a number of precautions which should be in place and the below is a basic guide:

- Make sure everyone knows what to do if they discover a fire including raising the alarm
- Make sure everyone knows what the fire alarm sounds like and what to do if it goes off
- Identify the primary escape route (this will usually involve going down the stairs and out of either the front or back door)
- Make sure the door key is accessible (but also out of reach of small children reaching through the letterbox)
- Identify one or more secondary escape routes (if the primary route is not useable)
- Have torches available next to beds
- Ensure that exit routes are always kept clear of obstacles and keys should be accessible; Ensure that window lock keys are accessible (but out of reach of small children)
- 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 no exit from the home is possible - go into a room, shut the door, put a blanket at the door and call for help;
- Practice the fire escape plan regularly.

Open Fires and Solid Fuel Burners - spark guards must be fitted for all open fires and solid fuel burners. Chimneys should be swept annually when burning authorised smokeless fuels and at least twice a year when burning wood or bituminous coal. If only used occasionally then it reasonable for it to be swept less often. Chimney sweep certificates should be sent by the applicants/foster carers to the Caldecott Fostering Administrator.

7.6.2 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 fuels 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 detector(s) present in their home in the correct places such as near the cooker, gas fire etc. Foster carers must ensure that all heating and cooking appliances are serviced regularly and a Gas Safety certificate is in place. The assessing social worker will check that a carbon monoxide detector is in place and mark down on the Health and Safety checklist that it has been seen and tested. The applicants are required to provide the Caldecott Fostering administrator with a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate for the file.



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7.6.3 Railings Banisters

Most serious falls are from heights and it is essential that railings and bannisters are suitable to prevent falls from landings and balconies for children and adults of all ages. The Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) provide guidance in this regard.

For children over the age of four they are often able to climb over, so good supervision is required. Foster carers should remain aware of safety in relation to upstairs windows and use window locks or safety catches.

The presence of window locks and safety catches, railings and bannisters are included within the Health & Safety Assessment report undertaken by the assessing social worker. This is also undertaken annually thereafter as part of the foster carer annual review or if the applicant/foster carer moves home.

7.6.4 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. The foster home Health and Safety checklist which is completed by the assessing social worker covers outdoor areas. The main points for consideration are:

- 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 preferably 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.

Further guidance and support on keeping children safe and preventing accidents in the home can be found at www.rospea.com/home-safety/advice/accidents-to-children or the Child Accident Prevention Trust at www.capt.org.uk

7.6.5 Vehicle Safety



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Caldecott Fostering ensure they check annually, foster carers vehicle documentation for all those who drive foster children and the vehicles used for doing so. This includes:

- A valid MOT certificate
- Driving licence and any driving offences committed
- Valid vehicle insurance certificate

Applicants/Foster carers are required to notify their insurance company that they are fostering and arrange for business use on their insurance. The Assessing Social Worker will check and verify the originals of the above documentation and the applicant will need to provide copies to the Caldecott Fostering administrator to be placed on file.

7.6.6 Home Insurance

All applicants/foster carers are required to have valid home insurance in place and a copy of the certificate must be provided to the Caldecott Fostering administrator and placed on file.

The above documentation is checked and verified by the assessing social worker as part of the assessment process. After approval, this is checked and verified by the Supervising Social Worker and recorded in the foster carer annual review report. Ongoing compliance will be monitored by the Caldecott Fostering Administrator.

7.6.7 Farms

Agriculture has one of the highest fatal injury rates of any industry in Great Britain but is the only high-risk industry that has to deal with the constant presence of children. Farms are homes as well as workplaces, and visitors, including children, may also be present on farms. Specific guidance about farm safety is set out in a publication by the Health and Safety Executive 2013, on preventing accidents to children on farms. This can be found at:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg472.htm>

This leaflet provides practical guidance on how to reduce the risk of injury to children under 13 and older children below minimum school leaving age (usually 16). It also identifies tasks and operations that are too hazardous for children and young people to do and includes examples of incidents from real life.

7.6.8 Pet Assessments

The psychological and physical health benefits to humans from keeping animals is well recognised in academic literature and needs to be seen as positive aspect of a foster home.



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Attitudes to ownership of different animals can be varied and in relation to fostering it is important that practitioners are aware of their own prejudices and feelings so that these do not affect decision making.

The safety of children should be paramount and assessments should take account of the general information about species and breeds, but ultimately needs to be based on the individual animal and their owners.

There is no statutory requirement for an assessment of dogs or pets in fostering households but Regulation 26 (2) (c) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, permits the service to obtain any other information they consider relevant. Caldecott use the CoramBAAF dog and pet assessment templates for this purpose. However, while much of the information in the dog assessment form will inevitably be provided by the applicants, it is important that the assessing social worker's observations reinforce what is being self-reported. The assessing social worker is required to observe during their frequent visits, the interaction between the dog and the applicants/birth children etc. The assessing social worker may also choose to speak to referees about their experiences of the dog especially if they have any reason for concern.

Where prospective foster carers own dogs that are listed and or registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, this will usually be deemed incompatible with fostering. Where dogs have been trained or used as guard dogs, this may be incompatible with fostering.

Factors for the assessing social worker to consider:

- Basic details
- Personality and history
- Living arrangements, training and routines
- Health and hygiene
- Safety
- Social worker observations

In certain situations, it might be appropriate to involve a specialist dog assessor in considering the suitability of a particular dog in relation to fostering. This might relate to factors such as, the particular breed, an unknown history, where the dog has had limited interaction with children or most likely, a combination of factors that have raised concerns.

In such cases, Caldecott Fostering will ensure that arrangements are made with locally identified dog assessment specialists and ensure that they understand the particular issues in fostering. Caldecott Fostering will commission reports from them where it is felt this is necessary, with an agreed format for these reports.

Caldecott Fostering expect that dog owners have carefully considered whether or not to neuter their dog and are mindful of any implications of this. We expect dog owners to have carefully considered the benefits of routine annual inoculations and the use of regular treatment for fleas and worms. This is especially important if caring for young children and babies.



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If applicants become approved foster carers, careful matching of children and young people will be essential. Full information needs to be considered about the child and the dog(s), including the dog's role and position in the family, to ensure safe matching decisions are made.

7.7 Financial Assessments

Regulation 26(1A) and Schedule 3 part 2, para 14 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 (as amended) make clear, that the assessment report needs to address 'standard of living'; and a financial assessment is seen as part of this.

Financial stability supports overall stability within a fostering household and it is important to check that applicants are financially stable. There is no requirement to have a minimum standard of income, however the assessing social worker will need to establish that the applicants have a responsible attitude towards managing money and are generally well positioned to foster.

The assessing social worker must be satisfied that the living arrangements for a child will not be put in jeopardy due to a financial crisis in the foster home such as non-payment of rent or mortgage and that the applicant will not need to use the fostering allowance to cover general household expenses. It is important that foster carers are allowed to concentrate on the task of parenting without being unduly stressed by or preoccupied with money issues.

Where an applicant intends to reduce or cease paid employment, the impact of this and their capacity to manage financially when they are not looking after a child must be carefully explored.

Caldecott Fostering use an adapted CoramBAAF financial statement and checklist which is designed to be completed by the applicants and they need to be mindful of completing this accurately and carefully (see appendix 9). The assessing social worker and applicants will jointly consider any issue arising from this. The assessing social worker should check the previous 3 months bank statements, including credit card and store card statements, savings accounts and wage slips to verify information and also verify that rent or mortgage payments are up to date. Any documentation relating to debts or savings should also be checked carefully. Where the applicant(s) has debts, it is important that the assessing social worker understands the 'story' behind the debt and any historical patterns. It is also important that the financial assessment gives a clear overview of the total amount of debt, payment terms and the timescale in which the debt will be settled. This is to ensure that the applicants have sufficient income to service any debt effectively and avoid the debt increasing where for example only minimum payments are being met. The importance of undertaking this level of scrutiny relates to the findings of the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (2022) undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership into the death of Leiland-James Michael Corkill.

For self-employed applicants, the most recent year's tax return should be viewed and the total earnings for the whole year should be verified. This will also enable the assessor to verify that the



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business is compliant with MHRC. It may be necessary for Caldecott Fostering to seek a reference from the applicant's accountant.

Where applicants are in receipt of benefits, it is essential that they have checked how their benefits may be affected by fostering and considered how they will manage with reduced income when not looking after a child, when benefits may not be reinstated straight away.

As part of the financial assessment, Caldecott Fostering will also undertake a landlord check where the proposed foster home is a rented property.

The assessing social worker needs to be confident about financial security and the above considerations should be reflected in the assessment.

7.8 Overseas Checks

There is no statutory requirement to undertake overseas checks in fostering households, however, Regulation 26 (2) (c) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) permits the fostering service to obtain 'any other information [they] consider relevant'. Where overseas checks are undertaken, it is important to remember that this will only confirm if an individual has been cautioned or convicted of an offence, it will not give a view on suitability to foster, nor should it be used in this way.

As part of the assessment process Caldecott Fostering may undertake checks with overseas authorities. These will normally be undertaken where:

- The applicant(s) has lived abroad for more than a year in one main country
- The period in question is within the last 10 years and/or is of a relatively long duration compared with the time spent living in the UK
- It is not possible to obtain a sufficiently detailed and reliable employer reference from a recognised international company or organisation for the period in question
- The country in question has a sufficiently developed legal and administration system to make it likely, that a check might be considered valid and reliable

In applying this policy, Caldecott Fostering will use some discretion taking into account individual factors including the quality of personal references that cover the period the person was living abroad and the emerging evidence in the assessment more widely.

The source of the check and how it will be undertaken will inevitably vary according to the specific circumstances of the country in question. For further information regarding the application process for criminal records checks or 'Certificates of Good Character' for someone from overseas, see [GOV.UK, Criminal records checks for overseas applicants](#).



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Efforts will be made to initiate these checks at Stage 1 in order to reduce the likelihood of delay in completing the assessment. The reasons for decisions about overseas checks will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.

7.9 Social Media and Internet Checks

There is no statutory requirement to undertake social media and internet checks on fostering applicants, however, Regulation 26 (2) (c) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) permits the fostering service to obtain 'any other information [they] consider relevant'. Under this provision Caldecott Fostering undertake social media and internet checks on fostering applicants and all adult household members.

These checks will initially consist of using search engines and social media platforms to enter the name of the applicants or family members. These checks may be expanded depending on any information that emerges from the initial checks or in relation to any other information that has become available in the course of the assessment. Checks will only be in relation to public space on the internet and applicants will not normally be asked to provide any passwords to private spaces.

Internet searches will identify any information in the public domain and will also indicate to the assessor that appropriate privacy settings are in place on the accounts. Any information gleaned from a search which raises concerns will be shared openly with the individual concerned to gain their perspective before making any judgements about their suitability to foster. The only exception to this, will be in cases where safeguarding matters arise in which case child protection procedures will be followed. The nature of checks undertaken and the outcome of those checks will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.

Social Networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat, Tumblr, internet forums, and message boards are a popular way for adults and children to communicate. Caldecott Fostering understands that some applicants and foster carers may wish to participate in social networking in their personal lives i.e. with friends and family. Applicants should, however, be made aware of the potential risks involved in the use of this type of media and be mindful of how information they post might be viewed when published, together with the potential impact on their reputation and by association, Caldecott Fostering.

Internet checks should only be carried out in a spirit of openness, with the full understanding of the person being assessed and this should be set out in writing in the applicant's consent to references and checks document.

Although in law, there is no requirement to get consent to access information that is in the public domain, it is important that prospective foster carers understand, that this is part of the assessment process and that it is done openly and with their knowledge.

Furthermore, if any information is found that raises questions about a person's suitability it must be shared openly with them and cannot be used as a basis for decision making without them having



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had the opportunity to comment on it. It is important to note that applicants are not in a position to withhold consent for an internet check because the information is already in the public domain.

Caldecott Fostering has a responsibility to offer advice and guidance to protect applicants and foster carers from publishing anything which may reflect badly on them. Caldecott Fostering and foster carers have a duty to safeguard children and young people in their care. Any applicant or foster carer associated with Caldecott Fostering is expected to behave appropriately and in ways that are consistent with the agency's values and policies. As part of the assessment process, the assessing social worker should share and discuss Caldecott Fostering's Internet and social media policies with the applicants.

https://www.proceduresonline.com/caldecott/fost/p_internet.html

https://www.proceduresonline.com/caldecott/fost/local_resources.html

7.10 Former Partner Checks

There is no statutory requirement to undertake a check with former partners but fostering services have discretion to do this under Regulation 26 (2) (a) of the Fostering Regulations (2011) which allows them to obtain any other information they consider relevant. Schedule 3 of these regulations requires information as to the foster carer's previous marriage or similar relationship, and so seeking former partner references may be seen as an appropriate way to gather this.

The importance of undertaking these checks relates to the findings of Part 8 Review for Brighton and Hove ACPC of the Care and Protection of JAS (aged 4) who died on 24th December 1999. JAS was placed with prospective adopters on 24th June 1999. JAS had 54 bruises and abrasions and three adult bite marks on his body at the time of his death. The assessing social worker did not consider it necessary to contact either of the male applicant's former wives. This was deemed to be unnecessarily intrusive and the male applicant advised that they would be difficult to trace.

The reviewer was able to locate the applicant's former wives within an hour and they were both willing to speak to the reviewer. The revealed significant safeguarding concerns which, had these been shared within the assessment, the assessment would have been terminated.

Caldecott Fostering routinely undertakes checks on former partners and all applicants will be informed of this at the outset of the process. Applicants should be reasonably expected to assist the assessor in finding an address or other contact information. With knowledge of the local authority where a person is living, the easiest way to locate their address is to consult the electoral roll. The edited version of this register is available on commercial websites for a fee. (www.tracesmart.co.uk or www.192.com). In addition, the use of the internet and social media such as Facebook can be effective in tracing a former partner.

Checks with former partners will be undertaken where:



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- The applicant has lived with a partner in a significant couple relationship, and has been jointly caring for children and whatever the time period of the relationship
- The applicant has been married to or parented a child with a former partner even if they were not living together at the same address

In the first instance, Caldecott Fostering will write to former partners and a written reference will be requested. This should then be followed up by the assessing social worker who should contact the former partner to confirm the contents of the written reference and to offer an interview. It is important that the assessing social worker ensures that Caldecott Fostering is aware of all former partners.

The requirement for completing the check can potentially be waived at the discretion of the Registered Manager in the following contexts:

1. When the applicant has been an approved foster carer since the end of the relationship and the fostering service can confirm that they completed a satisfactory check with that former partner
2. Where making contact with the former partner could put someone at risk for example where there was domestic abuse in the relationship
3. When the former partner cannot be located despite reasonable efforts being made to do this and these have been documented.
4. Exceptionally, when an applicant raises objections to contact being made with a former partner and can offer strong person-centred arguments, to justify not doing this check.

Where a decision has been made to waive a former partner check for reasons relating to risk such as domestic abuse, efforts will be made to seek independent corroboration of the abuse.

Where a former partner check is not made for any reason, efforts will be made to seek independent views on the nature of that relationship and the reason that it ended. Where possible, that will include interviews with an adult child or another person who knew the household very well at the time of the applicant's co-habitation with the former partner.

Checks will not be waived simply because the applicant prefers that they are not undertaken, because the relationship ended acrimoniously or because they do not want their former partner to know about their application to foster.

In making checks with former partners, Caldecott Fostering will use the CoramBAAF Former Partner Reference form and will send this with a standard letter setting out the reasons for the reference request. The outcome of the reference request will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.

7.11 Employment and Voluntary Activity References



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Regulation 26 (2) (a) and Schedule 3, part 2 para 14 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) outlines that the assessment report should address 'past and present employment'. An employment reference might be seen as one aspect of this.

Regulation 26 (2) (c) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) permits the fostering service to obtain 'any other information [they] consider relevant' and this could reasonably include references in relation to voluntary activity.

Regulation 26 (1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) permits the fostering service to access relevant records of applicants who have previously fostered or adopted, and where the applicants has been a foster carer in the preceding 12 months, they must request a written reference from that fostering service. Caldecott Fostering expects that the assessing social worker will read the files at all fostering/adoption agencies that the applicant has been known to (see section 6).

In the first instance, Caldecott Fostering will write to employers/voluntary activity contacts. Where adverse information arises from this check, the assessing social worker should explore this further with the referee and the applicant. Some organisations have a policy of only providing factual information in references. In these circumstances, consideration should be given to speaking to a colleague who may be able to provide supplementary information to the formal reference.

Caldecott Fostering will routinely seek employment and voluntary activity references in relation to:

- Any current employment or voluntary activity
- Any past employment or voluntary activity involving children or vulnerable adults
- Any circumstances where an applicant has fostered or adopted or applied to foster or adopt
- Any relevant current student placements (but not historical student placements as these are closely supervised and any concerns would have been picked up at the time).
- For self-employed applicants, a reference should be sought from a colleague, customer or accountant

Where the employer or organisation no longer exists, a decision about seeking a reference will need to be made in the context of the individual circumstances of the assessment. Sometimes it will simply not be possible to seek a reference and the Registered Manager has authority to make a decision about this. It is important that the assessor ensures that Caldecott Fostering is fully aware of the applicant's employment and voluntary activity history.

SSAFA (the Armed Forces Support Charity) will be contacted regarding applicants who are serving or who have served in the Armed Forces. Information will also be requested on the permanent nature of postings, employment or home circumstances if the applicant is a member of the armed forces, in order to assist Caldecott Fostering in planning for children.

In making checks with employers and voluntary organisations, Caldecott will use the CoramBAAF reference form pro forma and send this with a standard letter setting out the reason for the



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reference request. The outcome of the reference request will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.

All applicants are required to complete an employment history form and any gaps in employment must be accounted for.

7.12 School, College, Nursery and Health Visitor References

There is no statutory requirement to undertake school, college, nursery or health visitor checks, however Regulation 26 (2) (c) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 permits the fostering service to obtain 'any other information [they] consider relevant'. Undertaking such checks is seen as best practice.

Caldecott Fostering will routinely undertake checks with schools, nurseries and health visitors. These will be undertaken where:

- The applicant has a child or children currently in school or nursery or has left within the last year.
- The applicant currently has an allocated health visitor or has had one within the last year
- There are reasons for thinking that a check outside of these timescales might be helpful in gathering evidence or otherwise informing the assessment

When children are in college, the assessing social worker will use their judgement to decide whether a check is likely to add to the assessment depending on the individual circumstances of the case.

In making these checks Caldecott will use the CoramBAAF reference form pro forma and will send this with a standard letter setting out the reasons for the reference request. The outcome of the reference will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.

For foster carers who are applicants transferring from another fostering agency please refer to guidance regarding:

- Fostering Network Transfer Protocol
- Assessment Template for recording information gathered via File reading visit

8. FOSTER CARERS PREPARATION/TRAINING COURSE

Prospective foster carers should be prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop.



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The Foster Carers Preparation/Training Course will cover in detail all aspects of the fostering task, including the need for approved foster carers to notify the manager of any changes in their home circumstances, for example any new relationships they have where they wish their new partners to become a member of the household.

Applicants will be booked on the course once their completed application forms are received. All prospective foster carers will be required to attend this training, which is an integral part of the assessment process. The training courses will usually be planned to enable applicants to have at least 4 weeks' notice of their date and venue so as to encourage extensive participation. These courses can take place virtually or in person.

The objectives of the course are:

- To raise awareness and understanding of the key issues which need to be addressed by all foster carers;
- To assist applicants to consider more thoroughly the implications of fostering and to offer an introduction to therapeutic parenting strategies to support applicants to develop new skills in caring for children who may require extra help;
- To assist applicants to determine the type of resource they can offer to the children needing foster homes.

Those facilitating the course will provide written feedback on issues relating to the applicants for the Assessing Social Worker which must be used in the Form F assessment. Any issues of concern should be referred to the Registered Manager.

Applicants are required to attend the course and failure to complete it must be identified in the report presented to fostering panel, with a clear explanation of the reasons and circumstances. In the case of joint applications, both applicants must attend the full course.

Where issues emerge during the training as a result of which the Registered Manager or Agency Decision Maker decides that it is not appropriate to proceed with the application, the applicants should be visited by the Assessing Social Worker and notified in writing of the decision, with reasons. Advice should be given of any steps they may take in order to meet the criteria or of how they might pursue their interest elsewhere, if appropriate.

9. FORM F ASSESSMENT PROCESS – STAGE 2

Where the Assessment Stage One information has been obtained, and no notification has been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable to be a foster carer, the following must be undertaken:



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- Obtain the following information relating to the applicant and other members of the household, together with any other relevant information:
 - Details of personality;
 - Religious persuasion, and capacity to care for a child from any particular religious persuasion;
 - Racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin or cultural or linguistic background;
 - Past and present employment or occupation, standard of living, leisure activities and interests;
 - Previous experience (if any) of caring for their own and other children;
 - Skills, competence and potential relevant to their capacity to care effectively for a child placed with them.
- Consider whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster parent and whether the applicant's household is suitable for any child;
- Prepare a written report on the applicant which includes the following matters:
 - The information required to be obtained, as set out above;
 - Any other relevant information;
 - An assessment of the applicant's suitability to be a foster parent;
 - Proposals about any terms of approval.

The applicant must be notified that the case is to be referred to the fostering panel, be given a copy of the report and be invited to send any observations in writing within 10 working days beginning with the date on which the notification is sent.

Where, having regard to the information obtained, it is decided that the applicant is unlikely to be considered suitable to become a foster parent, the written report may be prepared notwithstanding that not all the Stage Two information has yet been obtained. A Brief Report may be prepared and submitted to the fostering panel in the same way as for a full assessment report. (There is no prescribed length or format for a brief report).

At the end of the 10 working days, (or when the applicant's observations are received, whichever is sooner), the report, the applicant's observations on that report, if any, and any other relevant information obtained, must be sent to the fostering panel.

9.1 Form F Assessment Process



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Upon allocation of the Form F assessment, Caldecott Fostering will grant the Assessing Social Worker access to the applicant's file on Caldecott Fostering's recording system, Charms. Here they will be able to access:

- The initial enquiry for
- The initial visit report
- The applicant's application form
- A report on the applicant's participation in the 'Skills to Foster' pre-approval training course once completed
- The applicant's evaluation for the 'Skills to Foster' course once completed

In addition to this, the Assessing Social Worker will be provided with the template for the Form F and the Agency's associated documents for:

- Health and Safety checklist
- Dog/Pet questionnaire
- Foster Carer Profile
- Household Safer Caring Plan
- Policy on use of surveillance in the foster home, associated risk assessment and written agreement.
- Personal Development Plan
- Financial Assessment Template
- Adult birth children reference template
- Personal referee interview template
- Ex-partner interview template
- Eco map template
- Family tree template

As statutory checks and references are returned the Assessing Social Worker will be able to access these on Charms. When verifying checks on the system, the Assessing Social Worker should note these on the Form F Document Checklist (Appendix 1) along with any areas to be followed up during the assessment. This checklist (Appendix 1) lists all the documents that the Assessing Social Worker must view during the assessment.

The Assessing Social Worker will familiarise him or herself with the application form and other available documents and contact the applicant(s) within one week of allocation to arrange a visit. It is expected that there will be no less than 8 home visits being no less than 2 hours long. For joint applications, each applicant must be seen alone on one occasion. Any children within the household should be seen regularly within the assessment and where appropriate, direct work should be undertaken with them (please see further guidance).

Additional expectations include:

- To draw up a written agreement identifying the dates for the assessment visits and a proposed date for the presentation to the Fostering Panel;



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- To interview any other members of the household;
- To interview all birth children;
- To interview all children/adults who the applicant has been involved in parenting (stepchildren, private fostering, SGO);
- To visit and interview at least 4 personal referees;
- If medical issues are raised, either historical or present, to discuss completing early medical examinations and to take such further subsequent actions as necessary;
- To contact ex partners;
- To ensure all parts of the Form F document are completed to a high standard including an Eco map to illustrate the applicant's support network. Family trees should also be produced with details of the applicant's parents, siblings, children and any other significant people in their lives who may impact of their fostering including ex-partners, stepchildren etc;
- To ensure that full in-depth checks have been made for Health and Safety and Safer Caring and completion of the relevant paperwork;
- To ensure that all supporting documents are completed and evidence verified where required;
- To complete a Foster Carer Profile and an initial Personal Development
- Plan (PDP);
- To support the applicants to access all pre-approval training, including the agency's mandatory online pre-approval training which must be completed prior to the applicants attending Panel;
- To visit the family to discuss the completed Form F before it is submitted to Panel, appending any disagreements, and to keep the family informed of progress throughout;
- To inform the applicant(s) of any revised timescales if there are delays or areas which require further exploration;
- Following approval of the prospective foster carers, to be involved in all necessary discussions with the Supervising Social Worker who will be responsible for the family and to attend a handover meeting with them and the family as needed;
- To immediately refer any issues to the Registered Manager;
- Should a case be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), to be involved in all relevant discussions and arrangements and to attend the IRM meeting if appropriate;
- To be responsible for the typing of the Form F. The typing should be to an excellent standard and will have been proofread, using correct grammar and spelling. It should be justified and the font used should be Century Gothic size 11 format;



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- To attend at least 3 supervision sessions with the Registered Manager (start, mid-way and prior to panel). Other sessions may be required depending on the complexity of the assessment or in response to emerging issues or concerns.
- To complete all stages of the assessment as set out in the CoramBAAF Form F and have all paperwork and the applicants ready for panel within 4 calendar months of commencement, unless discussed and agreed with the Registered Manager;
- On completion of the assessment to return all paperwork including handwritten notes and information relating to any direct work with birth children to Caldecott Fostering for appropriate disposal;

The assessing social worker will complete all parts of CoramBAAF Form F, which will record all appropriate factual information and address issues including the applicant's understanding of the following areas:

- Child rearing experience;
- Caring for children born to someone else;
- Contact between children and their families;
- Helping children to make sense of their past;
- Sexual boundaries and attitudes;
- Awareness of sexual and other forms of abuse;
- Health and health promotion;
- Promotion of education;
- Approaches to discipline;
- Awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults;
- Religion;
- Standards of living and lifestyles;
- Racial, cultural and linguistic issues;
- Experiences of disability and attitudes to disability;
- Awareness of equal opportunities;
- Understanding and dealing with young people's behaviour including encouraging children to take responsibility for their behaviour and helping them to learn how to resolve conflict.

The list is not exhaustive - other issues relevant to the individual applicant and his or her family may need to be addressed. The skills and personal qualities that need to be evidenced will be different



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according to the type of fostering the applicants want to do, e.g. babies and toddlers, short term, long term, emergency or stay over support. Assessing Social Workers are directed to the publication, *'Undertaking a Fostering Assessment – A guide to collecting and analysing information for Form F (fostering) England' 2021 by Roger Chapman* for areas to explore within each section. It must be stressed that this should be used as a guide rather than a rigid format. Professional curiosity must underpin all assessment sessions and assessment sessions will inevitably be led by the information shared by the applicant. Other additional suggested reading is also included at the end of this document.

Rigorous and in-depth assessment sessions will support the assessing social worker to present an informed and well evidenced level of analysis within the assessment. The assessing social worker is expected to provide a clear balance of narrative information against analysis and each individual section should contain analysis.

An assessment planner (appendix 2) is provided to support planning but sessions will need to be planned on a case-by-case basis and the order within the Form F template is not necessarily the order in which sessions need to be structured. Areas that require applicants to share personal and potentially sensitive information may be better placed later in the assessment once the relationship has been established.

Given the depth and level of information which needs to be shared by the applicant(s), setting homework tasks may support applicants to prepare for the sessions. Additionally this provides good evidence of the applicant's engagement and commitment to the process, their organisational skills and their written communication skills. Discussions need to take place at the outset of the process with applicants to seek their views and determine any potential issues/barriers and/or additional support needs. Homework resources are available in Appendix 3 and are optional tools to include with the assessment.

There are additional elements to be completed within the assessment process to support the matching process post approval. This includes the preparation of welcome materials (family profile, welcome book and video footage of the foster home and household members) and an analysis of strengths and areas for development in relation to matching. This analysis is crucial in supporting Caldecott Fostering to ensure safe and effective matching takes place and a proforma for this can be found in Appendix 4.

The applicants should take a lead in the preparation of welcome materials with support and guidance from the Assessing Social Worker.

Alongside the Form F and supporting documents, there are two quality assurance mechanisms to be found in Appendix 5 and 6. The pre-panel Form F audit tool should be completed by the Assessing Social Worker as the assessment progresses and should be shared in supervision meetings with the Registered Manager. Alongside this, a qualitative audit form is included which will be completed by the Registered manager on completion of the Form F assessment and this is provided to the Assessing Social Worker as a reference point for them when completing the assessment.



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The assessing social worker will contact the previous partners of the applicants (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant) (see section 7.10). Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the social worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable. All adult children of the applicant(s) living away from home will also be contacted.

Applicants will be encouraged to be actively involved in contributing towards the assessment and supported to provide their own written report/portfolio for panel to evidence their capabilities and to support their application.

The Assessing Social Worker will thoroughly check the foster home, completing the Agency's Health and Safety template, to ensure it provides appropriate and safe accommodation for the child, as well as safe transport. A fire plan is required outlining escapes routes, as is the evidence of home and contents insurance and a gas safety certificate. If foster homes have operational chimneys the Assessing Social Worker should also request evidence of the chimney being swept for the foster carer's file. All certificates provided must be dated within the last 12 months.

9.2 Household Safer Caring Plan

The Household Safer Caring Plan provided in appendix 1 should be completed with applicants during the assessment process. Other household members should also be included in these discussions to ensure that they are clear about roles and responsibilities.

Initially applicants should be asked to complete the worksheet on boundaries and lifestyle to support them to think about written and unwritten rules in their home. Applicants should be prompted to think about how it will feel for a child to come into their home not knowing anything about the family or their home. The worksheet should support applicants to identify unconscious rules and expectations within their household and these can then be discussed as part of the assessment. Where relevant, these should be reflected in the Household Safer Caring Plan and applicants should prepare a child friendly document as part of their welcome book that introduces children to expectations (rules) within the household.

It is important that applicants are mindful about how children and young people will receive information especially as they are unlikely to have developed a relationship at that point. It should not be an arbitrary list of regimented rules but rather a reflection of how the household operates and what the expectations are of everyone who lives there.

9.3 Initial Personal Development Plan

The assessment and approval process is only the start of the foster carer's journey. Their development and continued approval will rely upon their ongoing engagement in training, supervision and support.

The initial Personal Development Plan (PDP) template provided should be completed with applicants during the assessment process. As the document outlines there are a number of



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mandatory courses to be completed within the assessment process and it is therefore important that the applicants are aware of this to ensure they have sufficient time to complete the courses prior to panel. It is important that the applicants are clear about expectations in relation to training from the outset and understand why this is a fundamental expectation for initial and ongoing approval. If the Assessing Social Worker has any concerns about compliance with the training in the assessment process, this must be addressed with the applicants immediately and the Registered Manager alerted.

The Assessing Social Worker is likely to identify key areas for development within the assessment process and it is important that these are reflected in the PDP so that a plan is in place to address these needs post approval. There are a number of mandatory post approval courses which must be completed within the first 18 months of approval and these are outlined on the Foster Carer Training Schedule (appendix 7).

The following courses are mandatory and need to be completed within the assessment process. The Caldecott Fostering Administrator will allocate these training courses to each applicant and the Assessing Social Worker should track progress, view certificates and record completion on the pre-panel audit form.

- Safeguarding Children
- Health and Safety – Fostering
- Equality and Diversity
- Safe Administration of Medication
- Safer Caring – Fostering
- Skills to Foster

9.4 Children Who Foster

It is the expectation of Caldecott Fostering that all birth children within the household that are of an age to contribute to the assessment are spoken to with their parent(s) throughout the assessment and alone on at least three occasions. Where this is not possible, the Assessing Social Worker should alert the Registered Manager as soon as possible and the reason for this need to be clearly recorded. Where siblings are part of the household, they should be offered the opportunity to be spoken to independently of other siblings, however, many children feel much more comfortable engaging alongside their siblings. These situations should be managed on a case-by-case basis and decisions made in conjunction with the Registered Manager.

Non-resident children - Where applicants have birth children who do not live within the household full time, the above expectations apply although it is recognised that these arrangements can sometimes be complicated and consent will be required from both parents. There will be additional factors to explore both with the applicant(s) and the child.

Tools and resources – There is a Children who Foster resource pack included with this Framework (appendix 8). The Tools included here can be utilised as required in line with the age and stage of



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development of the child. It may be that the tools are not appropriate, however, in these instances, the content of the tools can be used as a guide to the areas the Assessing Social Worker should be aiming to discuss with the child (and parents where relevant) and seek their views on.

The starting point for any work with Children who Foster is developing a relationship with them and seeking the applicants' views on how best to engage with the child. Whilst craft and worksheets might work for some children, it will not for others and it is imperative that the sessions are designed around what suits the individual child so that the Assessing Social Worker can be confident that the child is fully engaged. It is also important to be mindful that a child's chronological age may not necessarily align with their stage of development or ability.

Third party information provided by the child's nursery/school/college, health visitor and personal referees is also a valuable source of information which can inform the work with children and be useful in triangulating the information gathered.

Caldecott Fostering's offer to children who foster – Caldecott Fostering recognises the important role of the children and young people whose parents foster and value the contributions they make to children who are living in the family home. Caldecott Fostering offers a range of activities for sons and daughters as a way to support the children and young people whose parents foster. Sons and Daughters group is available to children 5 to 18 years old and offers them a chance to take part in fun activities and meet others with similar experiences. Caldecott Fostering also runs a Young Person's Panel and encourages children who foster to join and be part of the process for approving new foster families.

10. TERMS OF APPROVAL

The availability of bedrooms for fostered children should be discussed as part of the assessment process. The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 provide that each child over 3 years old should have their own bedroom or, where this is not possible, the sharing of the bedroom has been agreed by the placing authority.

[The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review guidance](#) (3.92) states that "Foster carer assessments are designed to identify the ages, number or needs of the children to whom the foster carer is most likely to offer the best care".

Regulation 25(1)(b) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended) states that where the fostering panel makes a recommendation about a person's suitability to foster, it must also "recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given", and guidance clarifies that this might be in terms of the number of children and their ages.

Regulation 25(2)(a) states that the panel "must consider and take into account all the information passed to it", so if that information suggests to the panel that foster carers are suitable for a particular number of children, or children of a particular age range, then Panel's function is to make a recommendation accordingly.

Regulation 27(3) requires the Decision Maker to take account of the fostering panel's recommendation and any recommended terms of approval. The decision maker would be



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non-compliant with this regulation if they disregarded panel recommendations regarding terms of approval as a matter of routine.

In line with the above, Caldecott Fostering does not have 'standard' Terms of Approval and all recommendations made by Assessing Social Workers must be evidenced within the assessment on a case-by-case basis. The format used for recommendations at Caldecott Fostering is as follows:

Number of Children – The maximum approval number is three children and assessors also need to take account of the number and size of bedrooms available for fostering.

Where bedrooms are suitable for siblings to share this can also be included in the terms of approval if the applicants are assessed as suited to caring for more children than the number of bedrooms available for fostering. This is in the spirit of supporting sibling groups to remain together in foster care and so for example, if applicants have two bedrooms but are suited to caring for a larger sibling group, the number of children should say: 2 children (or more if brothers/sisters who can share are included). This could potentially provide a foster home for up to more brothers and sisters, if the bedrooms were of sufficient size to accommodate children sharing.

If bedrooms are not suitable for sharing, then the approval terms in this case would be two children. The assessment may deem that the applicants are suited to caring for only one child, even though they have two bedrooms available for fostering and the recommendation should reflect this.

- One child
- Two children
- Three children

NB - If bedroom size and the assessment allow, the following can be added to any of the above - (or more if brothers/sisters who can share are included)

Age Range - If it is evidenced that the applicants are suited to caring for children from birth through to 18 years, then 0-18 can be used. However, assessors need to be mindful that some applicants may not be able to care for younger children or conversely older children. In these cases the recommended age range should be adjusted accordingly to reflect the evidence in the assessment. If a foster carer smokes, they are precluded from providing a foster home to children under 5 years of age and neither would they be matched with a child with specific health conditions (see section 7.5.5 Smoking and Lifestyle). In these cases, where such applicants are suited to providing care to children through to 18 years then the age range should be stipulated as 5-18 years.

Categories of Fostering – Caldecott Fostering considers referrals for children who require emergency, short term, permanence, bridging and stay over (respite) care. Caldecott Fostering is also looking to increase the capacity to offer Parent and Child arrangements. In addition, Caldecott Fostering accepts referrals for shared care arrangements, i.e. for children living in residential schools and requiring a foster home for school holidays and weekends.

The categories of fostering used in the Terms of Approval at Caldecott Fostering are Long Term or Short Term or both, given these categories cover the main types of fostering arrangements the



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agency provides. Where specialist fostering such as Parent and Child is being recommended, the assessment should include a specialist report which provides evidence that the applicant has the necessary knowledge, experience or skills to undertake that role. Newly approved or existing foster carers within the agency will not normally be able to undertake specialist types of fostering without undertaking additional training and returning to review and panel for a change of approval to include the specialist category. This would then be stipulated in the terms of approval where appropriate.

Limitations – Where approval is recommended, any limitations of the approval to named children or conditions as to the age range or number of looked after children in the foster home may also be specified if required.

11. ASSESSMENT SUPERVISION

It is impossible to consider every eventuality or dilemma that arises during a large assessment such as the Form F, and therefore where other questions/issues arise during an assessment, Assessing Social Workers are required to discuss these during supervision to inform decision making or access further advice and guidance externally from CoramBAAF.

Assessing Social Workers (both internal and externally commissioned) will be provided with an initial supervision meeting with the Registered Manager at the start of the assessment, again at the mid-way point of the assessment and a concluding supervision meeting at the end of the assessment. An additional final supervision meeting may take place prior to presentation at panel if required. These meetings will be recorded in writing and uploaded to Charms on the applicant's file. If any significant issues/concerns arise at any point during the assessment process either in respect of checks and references or information gathered as part of stage 2 of the assessment, the Assessing Social Worker should not delay in liaising with the Registered Manager in between supervision meetings for advice, guidance, or decisions as needed.

The Assessing Social Worker will work closely with the Caldecott Fostering Administrator who will support them in terms of initiating and collating checks and references and gathering other documentation. However, the allocated Assessing Social Worker remains responsible for checking the content of all checks and references and their subsequent analysis of them, as this forms part of their overall assessment and recommendation to panel.

Documentation is shared securely online between the Assessing Social Worker and Caldecott Fostering using the Charms system during the assessment process and externally commissioned assessors are required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

The information gathered during the assessment, the Skills to Foster training course and the checks and references undertaken, will form the basis of the assessment. Once the assessing social worker has completed a draft, it should be submitted to the Registered Manager for quality assurance and discussion, in order to identify whether there are any issues that are unclear or need further work before the assessment is completed. The Assessing Social Worker should submit the completed



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Form F Pre-Panel Audit Form (Appendix 6) to the Registered Manager who should then complete the Qualitative Quality Assurance template (Appendix 6).

The final draft of the Form F assessment will then be shared with the applicants. The applicants should be asked to sign and return the report, if agreed, and/or send their comments in writing to the assessing social worker. It should be explained to them that they have ten working days to do this, and that any written comments they make will be circulated to Fostering Panel members, with the report.

The Form F assessment will then be passed to the Registered Manager to be endorsed and counter signed. The applicants must also be advised of their right to attend the meeting of the Fostering Panel, which considers their application.

The Assessing Social Worker and Registered Manager must ensure that all the relevant paperwork is completed and uploaded to Charms for the Panel Administrator at least fifteen working days before the relevant Fostering Panel meeting, to allow time for the Panel Administrator to check and collate the paperwork ready for distribution to the panel members 10 days prior to the panel meeting.

The date, time and venue of the Fostering Panel meeting will be communicated to the applicants as soon as possible, together with written information about the Panel process, who will attend and their respective roles.

12. THE PANEL RECOMMENDATION

The Assessing Social Worker will attend the Panel meeting, together with the applicants (if they so wish). The decision to attend rests with the applicants and a wish not to attend will not prejudice consideration of their application. Applicants who decide they wish to attend should be fully prepared by the Assessing Social Worker as to the procedure and expectations prior to their attendance.

The Panel will consider the reports together with all the supporting documentation and make a recommendation to the Caldecott Fostering Agency Decision Maker regarding the suitability of the applicant(s) for fostering.

The recommendation, with reasons, will be recorded in writing and, where approval is recommended, the category of fostering, any limitations of the approval or conditions as to the age range and number of children to be placed in the foster home will also be specified.

Where the applicant does not attend the Panel meeting, the Registered Manager will advise the applicant of the Panel recommendation within 24 hours of the Panel meeting. This will be verbally, by telephone or, where appropriate, a home visit.



13. AFTER THE PANEL RECOMMENDATION

Caldecott Fostering Agency Decision Maker will make a decision as to the suitability of the applicant, based on the reports presented to the Fostering Panel and the minutes detailing the Panel's recommendation. Where the decision is to approve the applicants as foster carers, the Agency Decision Maker will specify the terms of the approval i.e. the number and age range of children to be fostered, the type of fostering and any specific inclusions/exclusions if applicable. Applicants can be approved for more than one placement category.

Where a Brief Report has been submitted to the fostering panel, the Agency Decision Maker will, taking into account the fostering panel's recommendation, make a determination about whether to terminate the assessment or whether the full assessment should be completed.

The decision must be made within seven working days of receipt of the panel's recommendation and final set of panel minutes and must be recorded, together with reasons.

The Registered Manager will arrange for the applicants to be given verbal notification of the decision within 24 hours and written notice of the decision, with reasons, signed by the Agency Decision Maker, within five working days of the decision.

If the decision is to refuse approval, the Registered Manager will assess the need for further support/counselling and arrange any necessary follow-up action.

Upon approval, foster carers should be issued with an agreed form of identification and provided with access to the foster carer handbook and issued with a Foster Care Agreement.

The foster carer will be asked to sign the Foster Care Agreement between Caldecott Fostering and the foster carer, which contains the information the foster carer needs to carry out his or her functions as a foster carer effectively. In the case of jointly approved foster carers, both must sign the agreement. The foster carer will be given two copies for signature and will retain one signed copy. The other will be kept on the foster carer's case record, together with the report and supporting documents presented to the Fostering Panel, a copy of the Panel's recommendation and a copy of the Agency Decision Maker's decision.

The Foster Care Agreement will contain the following information:

- a. The terms of the foster carer's approval;
- b. The support and training to be provided to the foster carer;
- c. The procedure for the review of the foster carer's approval;
- d. The procedure for placements of children;
- e. The procedure for making representations and complaints;



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- f. The requirement to inform the fostering service of any change of circumstance, address or in the household composition, or of any registration as a childminder or application to adopt or of any offence;
- g. The requirements in relation to confidentiality and internet usage;
- h. The procedures for supporting behaviour and unauthorised absences of children placed with the foster carer including the ban on corporal punishment;
- i. The procedures for informing the supervising social worker of the child's progress and any significant events relating to the child;
- j. The need to give 28 days' notice in writing of they wish to cease fostering;
- k. The need to allow access to the Regulatory Authority.

The foster carer(s) will have been allocated a supervising social worker prior to attendance at panel and the supervising social worker should make contact to arrange a supervision meeting within 1 week. The supervising social worker must read the assessment and supporting documentation presented to the Fostering Panel (including the references) prior to contacting the carers and arranging to meet them, their family and members of their support network as appropriate. The supervising social worker should also note any actions required or advice given to the agency from the panel or the Agency Decision Maker and ensure actions are tracked and completed. A handover meeting/discussion between the assessing social worker and the supervising social worker should take place where this is possible. In addition, the Agency uses a 'Buddy' scheme and a fostering 'Buddy' will be linked to the new carers to support them in the early stages of their fostering career. The Buddy is a volunteer who is already a registered foster carer for Caldecott Fostering.

The supervising social worker will ensure that any newly approved foster carer is clear about their responsibility to notify the fostering service before any change in the composition of their household occurs or where there is any significant change in their circumstances which affects their fostering, for example any new relationship, pregnancy or bereavement.

If the supervising social worker discovers that there has been a change in the foster carer's household without prior notice, the Registered Manager must be informed and an immediate review of the foster carer's approval must be considered.

14. REPRESENTATIONS AND INDEPENDENT REVIEW PROCEDURE

If, at Stage Two of the assessment process, the Agency Decision Maker gives a Qualifying Determination that he/she proposes not to approve the applicants as foster carers, the applicant will be advised that if he or she wishes to challenge the decision, they have a right to submit representations within 28 days of the date of the written notice of the decision to the Agency Decision Maker. In addition, as an alternative, they may exercise the right to apply to the Secretary of State to request a review of the decision by an Independent Review Panel under the Independent Review Mechanism. Any such application must be made in writing within 28 days of the decision and supported by reasons.



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The foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if he or she is regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence. In addition, where it is decided at Stage One of the assessment process that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, there is no right to have the case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism.

If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within this period, the Agency Decision Maker will decide whether or not to approve the applicant as a foster carer (following a full assessment) or continue the assessment (following a Brief Report).

If written representations are received within the period, the Registered Manager will arrange for the reports and other documentation to be reconsidered by the Fostering Panel, taking into account the written representations, and make a new recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Panel Administrator will advise the applicant within a minimum five working days of the date of the Panel meeting when they can attend and their written representations will be considered. In these circumstances, applicants who wish to attend the meeting of the Fostering Panel can arrange for a friend or supporter to accompany them.

After considering the representations, the Panel will make a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker will consider before a final decision is made.

If the decision remains not to approve the application, the Registered Manager will arrange for the applicants to be informed verbally within two working days. Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant within five working days of the Panel meeting. Information about the Complaints Procedure must also be sent. A copy of the report to the Panel, the Panel's recommendation and the decision, with reasons, must be retained on the applicant's case file.

If the applicant decides to refer the matter to an Independent Review, the relevant Panel reports, any new information obtained since the Panel meeting, a record of the decision made and reasons, a copy of the written notification of the decision and a copy of the Panel minutes, if different, will be sent to the Independent Review within 10 working days of their written request (see also [Prepare for a review panel: adopters and foster carers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk))

After considering the representations, the Independent Review may make a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker will consider before a final decision is made.

Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant within seven working days of the receipt of the Independent Review recommendation.

Where the decision is to approve the application, the procedure set out in Section 13 above will be followed.

15. RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING FOR ASSESSING SOCIAL WORKERS



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Undertaking a Fostering Assessment – A guide to collecting and analysing information for Form F (Fostering) England: Roger Chapman, 2021

Assessing Adoptive Parents, Foster Carers and Kinship Carers Improving Analysis and Understanding of Parenting Capacity: Joanne Alper (editor), David Howe, 2016 second edition

Making Good Assessments: A Practical Resource Guide: Pat Beesley BAAF, 2010

CoramBAAF PN 72 Planning the assessment of a foster carer’s new partner

CoramBAAF PN 68 Reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for looked after children and their carers

Fostering Network Safer Caring Supplementary Resources -

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/safer-caring/safer-caring-new-approach-supplementary>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Form F Document Checklist

Appendix 2 – Assessment Planner

Appendix 3 – Homework Resources

Appendix 4 – Analysis of Strengths and Areas for Development

Appendix 5 – QA Documents, Pre-panel Audit Tool

Appendix 6 – QA Registered Manager Qualitative Quality Assurance Document

Appendix 7 – Caldecott Fostering Foster Carer Training Programme

Appendix 8 – Children Who Foster Resource Pack

Appendix 9 – CoramBAAF Fostering Financial Assessment Form