**Professional Development Plans (PDP) for Foster Carers**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

* **What is a Professional Development Plan?**

A PDP is designed to give you the opportunity to think with your Supervising Social Worker about your skills and interests in the fostering role or where you may need more knowledge. It is a place to record what you would like to focus on in the year. This may be to develop your knowledge in a particular area of interest (e.g. Child Sexual Exploitation) or in response to a child who you have living with you (baby withdrawing from heroin for example, or an unaccompanied sanctuary seeking child perhaps). It is also to help us to support you to make sure you are up to date with changing requirements in fostering and childcare.

* **What is the purpose of a Professional Development Plan?**

Caldecott Fostering uses the section on charms to record your training. However, your own learning and development is more than just attending training courses. We want to make sure that we are providing you with opportunities that help you to look after children in your care to as high a standard as possible.

This process is about Caldecott Fostering improving its service to you as Foster Carers and ultimately the children you care for.

* **Is this a regulatory requirement or is it just Caldecott Fostering’s approach?**

There has always been a requirement in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services for a Professional Development Plan. This is Standard 20:

20.4 – Foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service.

20.5 – Foster carers’ personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience.

20.6 – The reviews of foster carers’ approval include an appraisal of performance against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. The foster carer’s personal development plan is reviewed, and the effectiveness of training received is evaluated.

All fostering agencies are required to support their foster carers in a development plan and if you search other agencies’ websites you will see that they also talk about training plans, programmes, and development plans for their foster carers.

* **Will I have to write it on my own?**

No, you will be supported by your SSW to think about your PDP, and they will help you write it if you wish, but it is *your* PDP, so you do need to participate.

* **Can we have a joint PDP if we are part of a fostering couple?**

You can write your PDP with your partner, and you can share the same or similar goals, but you must have a PDP as an individual as everyone has different skills and experiences and often different roles within fostering.

* **My partner is the “primary” foster Carer, why do I need to complete a PDP?**

As a member of a fostering household, you share responsibility for all children living with you and therefore there are responsibilities we must support you with to ensure that everyone is safeguarded and the care you provide is appropriate within your role.

* **I work, how will I be supported to complete a PDP?**

If you work your SSW will make sure that they meet with you at a convenient time. This may be during your lunch break or outside of your working hours if you work outside of your home.

* **I have already completed courses and other learning; will this still count?**

Absolutely. All training contributes to your skill as a foster Carer and will be recorded on your PDP. This includes self-directed learning such as reading relevant books, watching documentaries, listening to Podcasts or accessing information through websites and training forums – all of this should also be included in your PDP to evidence your professional development. There may be a need to complete a course again if legislation or practice changes. Some courses are required to be updated as refresher training due to the important content in them. At no point will a foster carer ever be able to say they have done all training and do not need to do anything further. Ongoing training is a requirement of your agreement as a foster carer and of Caldecott Fostering under the regulations and standards.

* **How many goals should I have?**

There is no set number of goals. This is a discussion between you and your SSW.

* **How often will my PDP be reviewed?**

Your PDP is not a once-a-year exercise to tick a box. It will be reviewed during supervision and as a minimum, three times a year to discuss your progress and identify any issues which may be preventing you from meeting your goals.

* **If I want to do specific training which is not part of Caldecott Fostering’s training calendar, what can I do?**

There are sometimes specific needs for training where children living with you need you to have specialist knowledge. You can discuss this with your SSW who will be able to discuss this with their manager as to how to meet this need.

* **Where will my PDP be kept?**

Both you and your SSW should keep a copy of your PDP. Your SSW will keep a copy of your PDP on your electronic record on Charms. You will have been given a folder to keep together your PDP and any supporting evidence, so please use this to keep your records safe.

* **What is a reflective log?**

This is something social workers and other professionals complete as part of their training and is a bit like a diary. Whilst you are not a social worker, this can be a useful way to think through a situation that you have encountered and what you did that went well or where you think you could have done something differently. It is often the written version of what we are doing when we are thinking about things that have happened that day or we might be facing in the near future.

It can also be used to think about a course you have been on and think how you, as a foster carer, might use the knowledge or skills you have learnt, or to consider what your thoughts are on something you may have read, heard or watched. It can be bullet points, or it can be written more fully, it depends on who is writing it and the style they use.

It is not something that everyone is comfortable with but for some people it can help make sense of sometimes difficult and emotional experiences. Whilst personally powerful for some people, it is also an excellent method of demonstrating your development to others.

You should record your reflective logs on Charms and let your Supervising Social Worker know you have completed a reflective log – Progress Items have been added to Charms to enable you to do this - REFLECTIVE LOG FOSTER (CARER 1) and REFLECTIVE LOG (FOSTER CARER 2).

**Professional Development Plans**

Every Foster Carer will develop a Professional Development Plan (PDP) with their Supervising Social Worker at the beginning of their first year of fostering.

Your PDP will help you to develop in your role as a Foster Carer; helping you to improve your skills and knowledge. It will also help you to identify areas for further development in order to help achieve the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in your care. Your PDP will be monitored and reviewed during your regular supervision and your Annual Household Review to ensure that all mandatory training is being completed and any additional training needs are accounted for.

You are actively encouraged to engage and participate in learning and development and discuss your learning during supervision with your SSW. You will have an opportunity to provide an evaluation of any training you attend.

**The role of the Supervising Social Worker**

Your SSW will:

* Explain the mandatory training required
* Help you develop your PDP during your induction
* Signpost you to training courses and provide you with information about these if necessary
* Support you to book your place on training
* Help you with any practical arrangements to ensure you can attend training
* Monitor attendance at training and ensure training is completed within specified timescales
* Support you to undertake any e-learning if this is appropriate
* Inform the administrator/provider if you are unable to attend training that you are booked on
* Provide you with support and guidance to complete your TSD standards within the specified timescales
* Use supervision to discuss and reflect on your learning
* Regularly review your PDP and identify areas for development with you
* Raise any concerns about progress with your PDP and training with the Registered Manager; this may initiate a Foster Carer review if there are significant and/or persistent concerns
* Feedback to the Registered Manager any comments or concerns about training that you may have
* Highlight any gaps in the learning & development provision for Foster Carers to the Registered Manager
* Identify your strengths to support the overall Fostering Service such as assisting with the delivery of training, recruitment or buddying new Foster Carers

**The role of the Foster Carer**

You will:

* Commit to undertake all the mandatory essential training
* Engage in the PDP process with your SSW to ensure that you undertake on-going training and development
* Maintain your Professional Development Portfolio
* Actively engage in training and reflect on your learning; take responsibility for your own learning and development
* Put learning into practice
* Inform your SSW if you are unable to attend training you are booked on
* Evaluate any training you attend and provide feedback where necessary
* Request help from your SSW to make any practical arrangements to ensure you can attend training
* Be required to travel to attend relevant training

**Getting involved**

If you wish to share your experience and knowledge and help in the development of other foster carers, you may like to consider getting involved with the delivery of Foster Carer training. If you would like to get involved, please discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker.