

Working with Foster Carers - Guidance for Children's Social Workers

Foster Carers are a key part of the Team around the Child. As such they should be included in all discussions relating to the Child's Plan and how to implement it. Foster Carers are all different and with different lifestyles and experiences; some have birth children, some have foster children from different families; some drive, some don't; some work outside the home, some do not. Work roles vary from School Lunchtime Supervisors to Managing Directors.

Preparation, Planning and Negotiation

We all work best when we are prepared for the task in hand. So do Foster Carers. Before a child is placed they need:

- Full information about the child; their history; their likes and dislikes; their behaviour and how people respond to it; activities they do; details about their family and friends. NB The child's portrait used when a child moves from Foster Carers to Adoptive Parents can be useful
- Agreement about the decisions the Foster Carers can and cannot make
- Contact arrangements and how much the Foster Carers can be involved. This is not just reliant on what we would like the Foster Carers to do, but also what they feel able to do – their level of experience and/or confidence will have an impact, as will their availability.

All of the above need to be discussed and negotiated. Foster Carers are not employees. They do not HAVE to do anything, apart from care for the child appropriately and work with us to achieve their plan. But, if they cannot do something they are asked to do, we cannot force them to do it.

Like all of us, Foster Carers work best if they feel appreciated and valued for what they can do. They do not receive a wage and the relationship they have with workers is the key to how well they work with us.

Communication

Key to everything we do. You have a responsibility to:

- Talk to Foster Carers about the child and your discussions with him/her. They can then reinforce what you have said or correct any misperceptions the child/young person might have.

- Ask Foster Carers if they will do something with/for a child BEFORE you tell the child. There might be a reason why the Foster Carer cannot fulfil your promise.
- Ensure Foster Carers know when you are visiting; when there are meetings and can be there. Their opinion and knowledge of the child is valuable in these circumstances.
- Seek permission, before you offer to take a child out. (The Foster Family might have other arrangements) and ask a Foster Carer before you arrange the Child's Review – or make an assumption that you can hold the meeting at their home.
- Liaise with the Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker at all times. They, too, are part of the Team around the Child and will support a Foster Carer in completing their tasks working with the child if they know what they are supposed to be doing.

Challenge

- Foster Carers do not always agree with Social Workers. (Social Workers do not always agree with Social Workers). This is not a problem – and they might even be right. If Foster Carers challenge what you are doing/saying then discuss the matter fully with them. Even if you still disagree they will feel listened to and valued
- Respectful challenge is appropriate if you feel a Foster Carer could do something in a better way. If possible it is preferable to tell them at the time, rather than returning to the Supervising Social Worker and asking them to discuss the matter with the Foster Carer.
- Where relationships with a Foster Carer do become difficult, take advice and do everything you can do to resolve it. Liaise with the Supervising Social Worker, clarify the issues, consider what can be done to change matters and work with them and the Foster Carers to try and resolve issues in order to maintain the child's placement and continue working together to achieve their plan.

Remember:

Happy Foster Carers = Happy Children = Happy Social Workers.