

# SAFER CARE

## Strategies for Safe Caring

Aspects of care that can be risky:

### ***Showing Affection***

People have different ways of sharing affection and you need to be careful not to impose your way on others. In addition, if touch has meant something other than affection to a child in the past, they might not understand that when you try to show them physical affection this is not a prelude to sexual activity. Carers should show caution in how they show affection but should be responsive to the child at the child's request in a safe way. For example, the safest way to hug a child is side on, hip to hip, arm round shoulder.

Avoid tickling and wrestling games that involve touching that can be misinterpreted. If this is something that your children or foster children initiate, please discuss with your family placement worker.

### ***In The Bathroom***

All children who are old enough and able to bath and wash themselves should have privacy in the bathroom. Bathrooms should have a lock available to be used for children from approximately the age of 8+ years (if appropriate to the child's development). Locks could be accessible to being opened from outside to prevent children locking themselves in. Identification should be made of who will be providing the personal care to the foster children and any risk issues identified, e.g. male carer providing majority of personal care may be of concern to parents; or if child has history of sexual abuse. Parent should be consulted.

With regard to managing children with disabilities and their personal hygiene, the child and family's opinion should be sought where possible and there should be awareness of the child's history. Management of personal hygiene should be a part of the child's care plan.

### ***The Way You Dress***

It is important to think about how people dress around the home. Don't walk around in your underwear or nightwear. If you do you could trigger something in a child's memory and cause them to respond sexually. Their misinterpretations might leave family members feeling confused and uncomfortable and not knowing what to do about it. Make sure your family and children joining your household have a dressing gown and slippers as well as nightwear. You should encourage children to wear their dressing gowns or ensure nightwear covers the child appropriately.

### ***Supervision of Foster Children, i.e. Play***

Keep all younger children within earshot when they are playing and have a quick check when they go quiet. Don't let them play behind closed doors or in bedrooms where you cannot keep an eye on them easily.

Children who have been sexually abused should be supervised closely whilst playing with other children. You need to think about what responsibility you have as a carer of a child who wants to go out to play with other children. Think what you can do to make sure everyone is safe. You might decide that the child and others should play at your home. These decisions about safety and privacy are more difficult when they are about older children. You have to decide what's the best thing to do. If you are not sure, discuss it with your fostering link worker and child's social worker.

### ***The Foster Carers' Bedroom***

Some parents like to let young children get into their bed to talk, play and listen to stories, or to be comforted when they are not well. You need to be aware of the dangers of doing this when you are fostering a child. It is one of the dilemmas created for you, as a family, when you are trying to give your own children a normal upbringing whilst wanting to provide safe care for the children you foster.

You need to avoid doing the wrong thing for the right reason. Children and young people need comfort and affection, but sharing your bed can trigger experiences of abuse and give the wrong messages about what might happen and what is acceptable. It will be safer to provide all children with a time of warmth and affection outside your bedroom, telling stories and having a hot drink together.

### ***Children's Bedrooms***

Your family policy should be clear about bedroom rules, whether or not children are sharing. Children should not share beds, and they must not be allowed to touch one another's bodies. People must understand how threatening it can be for a child who has been abused to have their privacy invaded. As children grow older they should be given increasing control over who goes into their room. Anyone who needs to go into a child's bedroom should ask permission first and should leave the door open. This applies to children as well as adults. Men, in particular, need to be aware and sensitive about what they do.

- It is recommended that foster children in general should have their own bedroom.
- It could be appropriate for children to share if they are siblings, and are of the same gender, or under 8 years if of different genders and there are no risk factors.

- Foster children in short-term placements where the children's history is unknown should not share with other foster children or foster carers' own children.
- In long-term placements sharing may be possible subject to the child's wishes and an appropriate risk assessment is completed.
- Babies may share the foster carers' room but should be able to move into their own room.
- Foster carers should have appropriate arrangements to accommodate visitors which do not compromise safe care - they should not share with foster children.
- When entering bedrooms foster carers should respect privacy at all times and knock before entering. Negotiations should be reached with teenagers regarding cleaning the room.
- Holidays – should be at the discretion of the foster carer – If sleeping arrangements involve sharing, e.g. family room. This should be discussed with the child's care manager and any risk issues considered and recorded.

### ***Bedtime***

This calls for similar precautions to bathroom routine for the same reasons. Carers, including women, should leave the door open when putting children to bed. Everyone must think about doing things in a way that is safe for children. Both carers can be involved in putting children to bed but consideration needs to be given to the age of the child, gender, background history and personal independence.

### ***When You Go Out***

You need to be clear about what your fostering social worker and the child's social worker consider are satisfactory arrangements for caring for children when you are out. You have responsibilities towards the children you are looking after and towards people that you invite to babysit or look after older children. You need to think what you can do to avoid putting anyone at risk.

Carers should use people known to them as babysitters, but if they are to be regular sitters then the CRB form needs to be completed. It would be acceptable on a one-off basis to use sitters without a police check if the carer knows them and has confidence in them.

Carers can use their own older children to sit if this is deemed appropriate. As a general guide it is recommended that babysitters should not be under 16 years old. Any risk issues should be considered, e.g. carers' older teenager left with adolescents of opposite gender or children with history of sexual abuse.

As a rule, children no longer need a babysitter when they are 14+ but thought must be given to the maturity of the foster child and in what circumstances they are being left.

### ***Travelling by Car***

Think carefully about who travels alone in a car with a foster child. It can be a good way of giving a child the opportunity to have one-to-one contact because it is often easier to talk without eye contact. However, a child who has or may have been sexually abused might feel unsafe alone in a car with an adult, even more so if that is when they have been sexually abused in the past.

If the foster carer is travelling alone in the car with the foster child, consideration should be given as to whether there are any risk issues in respect of the child's history.

### ***Taking Photos and Videos***

You will need information from the agency about whether photos have been part of a child's abuse. If they have, be very careful about how soon you take a photo of the child's involvement in family activities. When you do take photos or videos, ask the child's permission first (according to their age and understanding) and make sure that they get copies for themselves and that they know who else will see them and why.

Photos and videos are sometimes taken specifically to pass on to sex rings and paedophiles and some children will be worried that there is a permanent record of their abuse and that they have no knowledge or control over who might see it. Be sensitive to how children react to having their photo taken. Be prepared not to take photos at all or to stop if you need to. Be aware of a child's history, ethnic and cultural background when considering taking photos of children in swimwear or nightwear. It is not advisable to take photos of children having a bath.