

Department for Children, Adults and Health

**Fostering Service**

**Behaviour Management Policy**

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**Behaviour Management Policy and Guidance for Foster Carers**

The fostering service is committed to providing high quality care to children in South Gloucestershire who need it. There is an acknowledgement that our foster carers cannot and should not be expected to manage what can be very challenging behaviour in isolation or in the absence of guidance and a shared understanding and agreement with regards to the strategies of support available to them.

**Introduction**

This document applies to all foster carers registered by South Gloucestershire Council. It outlines to foster carers, social workers, children and their families, our policy regarding the use of accepted behaviour management strategies for foster carers. Children looked after should be made aware of the policy so that they know how foster carers are allowed to help them regulate their behaviour.

Children learn how to behave by watching, listening and talking with the adults who care for them, they develop their understanding of human interactions by observing how the adults around them treat others. They need consistent boundaries and rules to help them develop a clear understanding of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and know that proportionate sanctions may be applied to them when things are ‘wrong’.

Sadly many children who need to be placed in foster families have been exposed to abusive and neglectful parenting and have witnessed adult behaviours that are confusing and frightening. The trauma they hold as a result of these experiences is often hidden and can manifest itself in many different ways. It impacts on their brain development and their esteem and feelings of self-worth. Children placed in foster families will often need patient support to re-learn many of the skills of good basic human interactions that many of us take for granted.

It is the role of foster carers, with appropriate support, guidance and training to help children re-learn these skills, enable them to take responsibility for their actions, without fear of disproportionate reprisal, teach them how to resolve conflict in a helpful way, which will encourage them to have a sense of safety and belonging in turn helping them to settle and develop.

**Regulations and Standards**

Fostering is a regulated activity and the fostering regulations and national minimum standards provide the framework for this document. Regulation 13 requires South Gloucestershire to provide its foster carers with a policy to enable them to be clear about acceptable behaviour management techniques. Regulation 17 ensures that carers are provided with the necessary information they need to provide safe and appropriate care as well as having access to appropriate, advice support and training to care for the children. National minimum standard 3 – ‘promoting positive behaviour and relationships’ outlines the ethos that carers are expected to employ when managing behaviours, including when children are missing from home. The South Gloucestershire Children’s Partnership has a specific policy for this and this can be found here – helen put in link!

**The South Gloucestershire Approach**

South Gloucestershire has adopted Signs of Safety as the practice model used across all children’s services and is an ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) informed Authority. As such all employees, including foster carers are expected to have an understanding of how early trauma can affect children and their families and parent in a way that seeks to build on strengths as a means to encourage change.

In addition investment has been made to equip carers through training and ongoing support to develop a therapeutic parenting approach with the children they foster. Every foster carer is given the book by Sarah Naish: “The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting” as a practical guide to help them.The aim of such an approach (taken from Sarah’s book) being ‘to enable the child to recover from the trauma they have experienced. This is done by developing new pathways in the child’s brain to help them to link cause and effect, reduce their levels of fear and shame and to help them start to make sense of their world’.

The biggest leap that foster carers need to be supported to appreciate and understand with such an approach is that for children they look after, their biggest fear is often adults, which comes from the life experiences they have had.

*“Many of the behaviours we see in our children are fear-based responses, but they may not appear to us in that way. Indeed, our child may present as rude, defiant and attention seeking. If we ….start from the basis that a child who has suffered some kind of trauma in their early life often feels out of control and experiences the world very differently, some of their behaviours start to make sense” (Sarah Naish: The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting. Pg 19)*

Therefore the strategies that children looked after have developed to combat fear over time, combined with the lack of opportunity for their brains to develop in ‘normal’ ways to enable them to know who and how to show trust, empathy and remorse, are simply not present for children who need to be fostered. Fostering children can therefore be very challenging but also very rewarding. Through providing consistent care, giving the right messages at the right time and working at the child’s pace, foster carers can hold the gift in their hands of changing the life chances for children in their care by helping them to re-learn and recover from their earlier traumatic childhood experiences.

**Behaviour Management**

* **Be clear about your expectations of the child or young person**

With all of the above in mind, children need to have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong and to know the parameters of the expectations and ‘rules’ where they are living. So, carers minimally need to provide clarity of expectations for children depending on their age regarding things like:

* Keeping their bedroom clean and tidy
* Privacy – including going into each other’s rooms and use of the bathrooms
* Mealtimes – preparation for food, getting snacks and drinks between meals
* Seeing friends – curfew times, keeping in contact when out and about, going where they say they are going
* School – getting to and from school and schoolwork
* Use of the internet, mobile phones, social media and gaming
* Smoking
* What children should do if they are unhappy or worried about something in the foster home

Social workers may not always know the children and their family very well at the point of a child coming into foster care. Social workers do however, have responsibility to try to ensure foster carers have good information about the children they are caring for. Documentation such as the child’s care plan, the placement plan and delegated authority are there to try to make sure the carers know the child’s background. These documents also help the parents, carers and child understand the rules and arrangements in place for the child whilst they are living with this foster family.

Volume 2 of the care planning and CA1989 guidance (2015) reminds us of the importance of the placement plan and the function that a good plan is there to serve:

* *An effective placement plan will ensure that the carer receives essential information about the child, including his/her health, educational and emotional and behavioural needs, how these may affect the child day to day and appropriate strategies for responding to them. In particular, it is important to identify any behaviours which have been of concern to a child’s previous carer and which have contributed to the breakdown of a previous placement.*
* *The purpose is not to label children but to ensure, first, that the child is going to an appropriate carer able to meet those particular needs and, secondly, that the child is not put in a situation in which s/he can be harmed or cause harm to others. Only by identifying difficulties as well as strengths is it possible to ensure that the child and his/her carer receive appropriate help and treatment, if necessary, for the child.*
* *Clarity and specificity in the placement plan will ensure that the carer understands the child’s likes, dislikes and routines, and reduce the potential for disagreements which may arise in situations where decision-making on behalf of children may be the responsibility of different people at different levels in the organisation such as the foster carer, the social worker, or managers. Lack of clarity about who does what can lead to role confusion and placement breakdown*

However, it is difficult to lay out everything and carers will need to think carefully about the ‘little rules’ that are present in their home that may not be discussed but may be a worry for a foster child e.g. if I go to the toilet at night do I flush it? Will I be ok to have my light on at night? Ideally to help children, foster carers will have been supported to provide the child with a version of their safe care policy that will help them to know these little rules.

* **Conventional behaviour management techniques may be not successful**

Managing behaviour through rewards and strategies such as star charts will seldom be effective for a child who already thinks they are of little value and is fearful of not being in control. They work on a basis that the child can trust the adults around them to take care of them, that the child can control their anger or fear and that the child believes they deserve good things to happen to them. None of these are the case for a child or young person who has been traumatised through adverse early life experiences.

* **Therapeutic parenting strategies**

Instead of conventional behaviour management strategies, we advise the therapeutic approach which will help a child feel safe and valued and that in turn will support them as they modify their behaviour. Each response should be tailored to suit the needs of the individual child or young person in the foster home and it should be based on supporting positive behaviour.

Sometimes foster carers will need to be reactive and sometimes proactive. They might be reactive by distracting a child or removing a dangerous item or using active listening for them. Alternatively they may be proactive, knowing in advance that a situation will be a challenge for the child or young person they foster, they can talk it through with them to relieve their anxiety in advance, make the day more predictable and safe for the child, change the range of activities available.

Carers will always be expected to support and encourage children to do the best they can, so any strategies put into place should be based on building on strengths in children so that they are encouraged and rewarded. So rather than sanctioning misbehaviour foster carers should feel supported and helped to understand how to they can notice and reward good behaviours. They should be encouraged and ‘name’ good things they observe in the children they care for, however small…. ‘I felt really proud of you when you……., I really liked it when you………, I really appreciate you helping me to………, it’s great that you remembered to tidy your room today without me having to ask’. Statements like this will go a long way to encourage children, improve their feelings of self-esteem and self-worth and improve relationships within the foster family.

Alongside this, children need to know that there are ways that they are able to express their anger/upset when they need to. Rather than employ an approach that says *you must not* punch the walls/hit others/throw things, think about things that they *can do* like walk around the block, shout out loud in the back garden, punch a pillow in their room, go to the garage and kick the punch bag, so that children are left with a means to express themselves without any confrontation escalating.

When there are incidents of anger it is helpful afterwards to undertake a debrief with the child if they are able and ask them when they are calm, how they would have liked the foster carer to respond. This gives important messages to the child; that the foster carer cares for them, wants to listen and understand them and is able to recognise that they might not always get things right but wants to try. This is an extremely important message to the child and helps them to begin to learn to trust and invest.

Positively managing behaviour in this way takes time and thought and has to be concentrated on the needs of this specific child at this specific time in their lives. It is important that you use the supervision sessions with your supervising social worker to think through how you help positively manage a child’s behaviour. Think about what had been happening for them earlier in the day and see if you can identify any particular trigger for making that situation more stressful for the child. Maybe you will see patterns of reactions emerging which can help you to plan future interventions. In addition, you should always make sure that any particular incidents are added to your recording.

**Sanctions**

It is understood that there will be occasions when some kind of sanction will need to be imposed as other techniques have not worked and behaviours are persistent or serious. The Fostering Service acknowledge that these are difficult decisions for foster carers to make and so support them in helping children change behaviour. It can be useful in these situations to talk about children making safe or unsafe choices in the way they behaved prior to use of any sanction. Children in foster care already feel a low sense of self-esteem. Removing privileges or applying sanctions often feeds into this negative self-image and can be very unhelpful to their emotional development. Where they are used, sanctions must be reasonable and the minimum necessary to achieve the desired objective – that is to increase the likelihood of the positive behaviour. This means that they should not be imposed as an act of revenge, punishment, they should not be applied in the heat of the moment and only used when there is a belief that they will prevent further negative behaviour. We advise that you discuss these with the child’s social worker to consider the impact on the child of the sanction proposed. This can be helpful in ensuring that decisions made are not going to trigger memories that may relate to abusive situations for children and as such re-traumatise them. Any sanction should also only last as long as they need to, allowing children to have the opportunity to make a fresh start in the shortest time period they can.

Here are ideas of some sanctions that might be considered to help positively change a specific child’s behaviour. Foster carers should be able to demonstrate through their written recording that the sanction was necessary and the impact it had on the child.

* **Curtailment of leisure activities/time**. Foster carers should bear in mind that, given that children looked after are often more isolated than other children, this should not include withdrawal of regular activities that they may do i.e brownies, swimming clubs.
* **Removal of equipment eg TV/gaming equipment**. Foster carers should bear in mind that, the time for this should be proportionate and the child needs to understand how long this will be from the outset – if they have no understanding of the goal they are working towards or feel it is overly harsh it is unlikely to have effect.
* **Withdrawal of privileges** **for a set short period of time e.g staying up later.** Foster carers should bear in mind that, some children in foster care do not think they are worthy of privileges and may feel a sense of shame if they lose them.
* **Contribution of money towards damaged goods**. Foster carers should bear in mind that this should not be used in isolation – if we are trying to give a child a message we understand where their anger has come from and this is valid, it’s just the way they expressed it that is problematic, we need to ensure we have given them an alternative agreed way to express their anger should a similar situation arise in the future. So the expectation they contribute something towards the costs is as well as not instead of the conversation about how you could help them. It would be helpful for foster carers to discuss amounts of contribution with your supervising social worker and the child’s social worker as money to children means so many different things.
* **Reparation** **eg if a child have stolen something (and this is known, not suspected) - being involved in its return with apology**. Foster carers should bear in mind that, this adds further shame to young people who may have already been told and made to feel they are rubbish, it may make the adults feel better about the situation, but it won’t actually help the child. They can say “sorry” merely as a word with no understanding of what it means.
* **The restriction on use of social media** **where there may be concerns around exploitation and this has been agreed with the child’s social worker.** Foster carers should bear in mind that this needs to be used carefully as withdrawal of this could place children at increased risk of harm.

**The following sanctions are not permissible***:*

* Any form of corporal punishment, including, slapping, punching, rough handing, throwing things
* Any sanction relating to the deprivation of food or drinks
* The withholding of pocket money
* Any restriction on a child’s family time or friends that is agreed as part of a child’s care plan
* Any restriction to access to helplines or communications with the child’s social worker, support worker, independent reviewing officer, an officer appointed by the court
* The withdrawal of any medical treatment
* Intentional deprivation of sleep
* The modification of behaviour through bribery or use of threats to get a child to comply ‘if you don’t come right now we will leave you behind’ – foster carers have no idea whether comments like these may trigger memories and invoke a ‘fight or flight’ response in a child and may well therefore compound a difficult situation.
* Use of threatening or demeaning language
* The use of film to record challenging behaviour that children may display – any action is likely to mean that you are not available to the child to help them through what is troubling them or it may provoke them further or both. There is no benefit to anyone for this to be done. Foster carers should have the support of their supervising social worker to be able to talk through the behaviours any child in their care is displaying that is of concern to them.

**Restraint**:

The restraining of any child is not permitted unless the foster carer has received training in appropriate techniques and there is agreement formally with the team around the child that this form of restraint can be used for a particular child. Foster carers should not assume that because they have had training in restraint to manage one child, that this can be applied for any child they subsequently look after. Guidance and training about restraint techniques changes frequently and without clear agreement on its use it leaves children open to potential harm and foster carers open to allegations. Any form of restraint used must be recorded as per the recording policy and is a Notifiable Incident – make this a link

**Do’s and Don’ts at a Glance**

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| **Do 😊** | **Don’t ☹** |
| Do everything you can to increase a child’s self-esteem and self-confidence, remember that behaviours come from feelings, if a child feels good about themselves, that will help | Don’t keep asking a child why they behaved in a certain way, it is unlikely that they will know if it was prompted by their early life experiences |
| Do be really clear about the household rules, but try to keep these to as few as possible | Don’t make a child say sorry, they can use the word without understanding the meaning just to please you and it can lead to humiliation and shame |
| Do try to make life as predictable as possible for them so that life feels safe | Don’t use a sanction as a form of revenge, make sure you are calm first before discussing an incident |
| Do try to react positively in situations by distracting a child or moving a toy before a difficulty escalates | Don’t use a sanction to punish, a child is likely to already feel they only deserve bad things to happen, so this confirms their low self-esteem |
| Do try to explain things in little sentences, chunk and check, - a little chunk of information and check they have understood it, and make sure you have their attention before you say anything | Don’t talk at them for ages downloading your frustration, they will tune out and then you may feel cross that they are not listening |
| Praise children for specific things, “catch them doing something good” | Don’t use a sanction to make them “learn a lesson”, the idea of cause and effect is impaired with children who have had adverse childhood experiences |
| To help them learn that it is safe to relinquish control, offer them “two good choices”, - “would you like the green or blue bottle of shampoo?” | Don’t use sanctions which might trigger memories of abuse for children |
| Do give “permission” for children to express anger safely | Never hold grudges, but learn from incidents to try to get a better outcome next time |
| Always make sure there is a fresh start when the matter is over. If appropriate, ask them later how they would like you to respond to them in a similar situation in the future. Let the children know they have a special place in your heart due to who they are, not what they do | Don’t expect friends and family who do not know about the particular difficulties for children with adverse childhood experiences to understand |
| Sometimes you’ll get it right, sometimes you’ll get it wrong, don’t give up and don’t beat yourself up, just take a breath and give yourself a fresh start too | |
| Remember your supervising social worker wants to help and can reflect with you on different strategies so keep them in the loop and remember to record what has been happening. | |