CHILDREN’S WISHES AND FEELINGS

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 2011 (3.31-3.42)
National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011 (Standard 1 & 25)

Introduction
The wishes and feelings of children who are looked after or about to become
looked after must be taken into account at every stage, including consulting
with parents, professionals and others significant to the child. This helps
children to feel listened to and valued. Where their wishes cannot be met, due
to their own welfare or that of others, a clear understanding of the reasons,
assists them in developing awareness of their own needs and how these must
be balanced with those of others. Enabling children to express their views is
also a key component of child protection. Foster carers have a central role in
helping children participate in decision-making and verbalising their opinions.

Foster carers should aim to generate a culture and openness and trust with
foster children, enabling them to share their wishes and feelings, including
anything, which they are concerned about.

Involving Children in Decision-making
Due to their relationship with the child, foster carers are in a unique position to
help the child express their views and to explain the content of the Care Plan;
foster carers should be supported in this by their supervising social worker.

Looked after children should be helped to participate in decision-making and
their views should actively be sought with regard to:

- The choice of placement, which requires that they have knowledge of and
  contact with the foster family in advance of the placement, except where a
  placement must be made urgently to safeguard their welfare;
- The content of the Placement Plan, including contact arrangements;
- Ongoing reviews of the Care Plan, where they should have an
  independent advocate if they wish;
- Feedback about the foster placement to their social worker on a regular
  basis and for the annual fostercare review;
- Making age-appropriate choices in their day-to-day life, for example
  concerning food and clothing;

In their role as corporate parents, the local authority and foster carers will not
always be able to accede to the wishes of the child; if they are contrary to
their interests or adversely affect other members of the fostering household,
the child should receive a clear explanation of why it is not possible from the
most appropriate person, normally the social worker or foster carer.

Protecting Children’s Rights
Social workers and foster carers should ensure that children are given a copy
of the Children’s Guide appropriate to their age and understanding and, if
necessary, read through it with them. They should ensure that children understand their right to:

- Contact their social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer at any time without the necessity to explain why;
- Have access to independent advice and support, including from an Independent Visitor or Children’s Rights Officer;
- Contact Ofsted;
- Contact Childline and make private phone calls or access websites in order to get help and advice;
- Make a complaint informally or through the Complaints’ Procedure without fear of adverse consequences;

As far as possible complaints should be resolved informally, but staff and foster carers should not let their relationship with the local authority prevent them from continuing to support the child to a more formal stage, if the child wishes it.

Where the complaint is about the fostering service, an individual staff member or foster carer, it should be ensured that children receive support from an independent source. Any feedback received should be used to improve the service offered.

**Children with Disabilities**

The particular requirements of children with disabilities, special educational needs or complex needs should be taken into account and an individualised approach taken to establishing their wishes and feelings. Foster carers should be supported to help them express their views and feelings, using the child’s preferred communication method.

**Training for Foster Carers**

Supervising social workers should assist foster carers to develop listening skills, which may include attending counselling or similar training.

See also Complaints Procedure.