

Department for Children, Adults and Health

**Fostering Service**

**Core Practice Standards: Children’s Social Care**

* **Fostering**

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**Fostering Service**

**Introduction**

Core Practice Standards are an agreed set of expectations that describe the minimum service or level of practice that should be carried out by a practitioner within the Fostering Service.

These standards are informed by statute, with particular reference to the Fostering Regulations 2011, the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and Care Planning Regulations.

The purpose of the Core Practice Standards is to ensure that the Fostering Service provides a consistently high standard of service to looked after children and foster carers. South Gloucestershire Council’s Corporate Parenting Vision is;

“To be the very best corporate parent we can be.”

These Core Practice Standards give a structure to support this vision. Together, we want to ensure that we;

“Enable every child and young person to thrive. Children and young people should have a good start in life, be safe and do as well as they can, while being able to access support where necessary” – South Gloucestershire Council’s Statement of Purpose (page 3).

The Core Practice Standards are a framework for holding together both ongoing practice challenge and support. As a result, they will support planning for the individual worker’s continual professional development.

**The Core Practice Standards for Children’s Social Care:**

**Core Standard One:** Risks are identified and responded to in a timely way

**Core Standard Two:** Communicating with children is central to our practice

**Core Standard Three:** Assessments are timely, comprehensive, analytical and of high quality. They result in focused and timely help

**Core Standard Four:** Services are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, culture, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation

**Core Standard Five:** Children and young people are supported by plans which promote their independence, choice, wellbeing and keeps them safe

**Core Standard Six:** Children and young people feel safe and thrive where they are living

**Core Standard Seven:** Children and young people experience a seamless service

**Core Standard Eight:** Co-ordination and collaboration with other agencies is effective and promotes good outcomes for children

**Core Standard Nine:** Management oversight and decision making directly contributes to better outcomes for children

**Core Standard Ten:** Supervision directly contributes to timely and effective interventions that can respond flexibly to presenting risk and needs

**The Core Practice Standards for Fostering.**

“It is argued that the experience of positive, safe and stable relationships helps children and young people build secure attachments, develop self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance and contributes to a strong sense of identity and belonging.” (Fahlberg 1994, Ryan 2012; Care Inquiry 2313)

Fostering is an emotional, challenging, rewarding and at times, exhausting role. In order to achieve the expectations placed on them, foster carers need a system around them that supports, challenges and values them.

**Core Standard One:** Risks are identified and responded to in a timely way

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| 1.1 | The Complaints, Standard of Care Concerns and Allegations Policy makes the procedure clear if a foster carer is subject to a complaint or allegation. Investigations into complaints, standards of care and allegations will be undertaken in a timely way and with respect. The policy is available for all to read on the website and it includes expected timescales for investigations to be completed. The Corporate Parenting Service Manager is the “Designated Person” for any investigations and will ensure the social workers involved are fully supervised so that they are able to undertake a clear and balanced investigation. Carers will continue to have support and supervision from their own social worker during the process, an independent person will be commissioned to provide independent support and a different social worker will undertake the investigation. |
| 1.2 | Unannounced visits will take place as per the policy. One visit a year will be undertaken by a non-allocated supervising social worker as this will provide a “fresh pair of eyes” to the household.  Unannounced visits need to be undertaken without any notice to the fostering household. Good practice is that one unannounced visit a year should include both carers, children in placement and carers’ children. |
| 1.3 | Safer Care Policy.  The supervising social worker will ensure that every family has a safer care policy. This is a dynamic document which will be updated as necessary according to the children in the home. This is not a health and safety document, it is a child friendly policy describing how the carers will look after the child or young person to reassure them and to prevent any trigger of a memory of abuse due to their treatment of the child. |
| 1.4 | Risk Assessments.  Every fostering household will have a risk assessment completed which considers the family dynamic and the members of the household. This will be completed by the supervising social worker after the Placement Planning Meeting in consultation with the foster carer.  Every child or young person in care will have an individual risk assessment which will consider any risks posed to them by others, any risks posed to them by themselves and any risks they may pose to others. This will be written by their social worker in consultation with the foster carer and where possible, with the child or young person who will be able to state how they would like to be treated by their foster carer in any given situation, for example, if they begin to feel angry and need space to become calm again. |
| 1.5 | Observations of practice will be undertaken of the interaction between the foster carer and the child once a year. The observations will review the quality of the interaction and the nature of the relationship. They provide a snapshot of the child’s lived experience. These observations can occur as part of a supervision visit but need to be recorded on Mosaic by the supervising social worker as an “Observation”. |
| 1.6 | Supervising social workers will see all the children in the house on their own at least once a year. This is to ensure that each child has a chance to explain if they would like anything to change within the household. There may be some occasions when this might be too distressing for a child and the team manager will agree that for those small minority of children, this will not be a 1:1 conversation. For those children, the supervising social worker will creatively think of alternative ways to gain the child’s views. |
| 1.7 | Fostering Regulations 2011 Schedule 6 and 7 notifications, (serious incidents), will be monitored by the service manager. Foster carers will complete the “Serious Incident Notification Form” and send it to their supervising social worker who in turn will pass it to the Service Manager. |

**Core Standard Two:** Communicating with foster carers and children is central to our practice

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| 2.1 | All foster carers will have an allocated named supervising social worker who will be introduced to them within two weeks of panel. This social worker is responsible for the support and supervision of the foster carer. This is a complex role in terms of providing both practical and emotional support alongside challenge and scrutiny. |
| 2.2 | Contact details of the supervising social worker, the team manager and the team will be provided to the foster care on the point of allocation. |
| 2.3 | Supervising social workers will use their electronic diaries so all staff are aware of their whereabouts and can inform foster carers when they are next in the office or available. |
| 2.4 | Supervising social workers will use the out of office facility on their electronic diary and will tell their foster carers if they are planning to be out of the office for more than a week. |
| 2.5 | Supervising social workers will divert their landline to their work mobile or to the duty line if they are not available. |
| 2.6 | In order to listen to foster carers and hear their views, feedback about the fostering task and the fostering service will be sought from them and all the children in the household at the time of the annual review. |
| 2.7 | Foster carers will receive regular newsletters about the service and a website is being developed where all policies and information will be easily accessible. |
| 2.8 | Three Engagement Events will be held each year to which all foster carers are invited, and they will be attended by managers of the service. It is an opportunity for an exchange of information and ideas between the foster carers and the Service. |

**Core Standard Three:** Assessments are timely, comprehensive, analytical and of high quality

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| 3.1 | Initial visits for prospective foster carers will be undertaken within five working days of receiving the Fostering Enquiry Form, (dependent on the applicant’s availability). Initial Visit reports will be proofread by a fostering team manager who will decide whether to progress the prospective carers to Stage One.  Applicants will be allocated an assessing social worker within ten working days of Stage One checks being satisfactorily completed to commence the CoramBAAF Form F assessment. They will also be invited to attend a Skills to Foster Preparation Course. |
| 3.2 | CoramBaaf Form F Assessments will be completed within four months of allocation. The assessment will contain information and analysis with reference to evidence and research and will give clear recommendations whether the applicants are suitable to foster and where their strengths and support needs will lie. |
| 3.3 | Regulation 24 assessments will be undertaken within the 16-week timescale. If an extension of eight weeks is required that will be considered at fostering panel. The report will include all information necessary to make the decision whether the children can remain with the carers. |
| 3.4 | The fostering panel will consider the assessment report with all supporting documentation and make a recommendation about their suitability to foster to the Agency Decision Maker within eight months of the applicant’s initial enquiry. |
| 3.5 | The role of the fostering panel is to scrutinise all the reports presented and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker will make their decision within seven working days of receipt of the Panel minutes and foster carers will hear within five working days of the decision being made. |
| 3.6 | Annual review reports should be completed within a year of the last review and given to foster carers to read off before the review meeting. They will be evidence based and analytical. They will include a wide range of feedback including from the foster carer, the children within the household, the child/ren’s social worker(s); the IRO and school should also be approached for feedback. The bundle of documentation for an annual review includes the updated carers’ chronology, the personal development plan of the carers, the safer care policy, the health and safety form, the welcome to home booklet and any pet assessment forms. The report will assess whether the carer is suitable to continue to be registered as a foster carer, whether they are on the correct skill banding and whether the approval is still appropriate. The report will also include the reflections of the foster carer on their year of fostering and their development plan for the year ahead. |

**Core Standard Four:** Services are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, culture, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation

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| 4.1 | The child’s profile and the placement request form contains the voice of the child so that full individualised information is given to foster carers. Where appropriate the social worker will ask for the help of the child or young person and the previous foster carer to complete the placement request form. |
| 4.2 | Matching of children to carers will include consideration and sensitivity to the child or young person’s needs and the carers’ capacity to meet those needs. There will be reference to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, culture, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation. |
| 4.3 | The placement planning meeting will ensure that the needs of every child are considered and met in the placement they are entering. Foster carers will be supported to gain any additional knowledge or skills to make sure the child or young person receive sensitive care. |
| 4.4 | The supervising social worker will ensure that all carers have child-friendly welcome to home booklets to introduce their home and family to any new child coming to stay with them. |

**Core Standard Five:** Foster carers and children and young people are supported

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| 5.1 | As part of their induction, foster carers receive the fostering handbook which details all the support available to them including a buddying scheme, social events and support groups. |
| 5.2 | Foster carers will be paid promptly, the scheme for payments will be fair, open and transparent. |
| 5.3 | There are clear policies to support foster carers undertaking the fostering task which can be found in the foster carer handbook. (Currently being updated and reviewed). |
| 5.4 | There is a clear training schedule which will be available to all carers. Carers will be issued with a Personal Development Plan (PDP) which will be tailored to the specific needs of the carers and the children they look after. The PDP will be checked at each supervision visit and reflections on the learning and the impact of the training on the foster carers’ practice will be noted. The PDP will be reviewed by a manager annually. |
| 5.5 | New carers will be supported to complete the TSD within the first year of fostering, or first 18 months if they are Connected Carers. |
| 5.6 | Foster carers will have a copy of the escalation and complaint policy at the point of registration. |
| 5.7 | If any foster carer is subject to a complaint, a standard of care concern or an allegation, they will be offered an appropriate level of support. Any carer subject to an allegation investigation will have independent support provided. |
| 5.8 | Placement stability meetings will be called when a foster carer or a supervising social worker perceive that the situation in the home is becoming unstable and the placement might disrupt. The supervising social worker will ensure the foster carer, the child’s social worker and any other relevant professionals meet to discuss support for the household. It may be appropriate for the child or young person to also be present. A manager will be consulted before the meeting and may decide they need to chair it in order to achieve actions from the meeting. |

**Core Standard Six:** Foster carers are supervised so children feel safe and thrive where they are living

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| 6.1 | Every foster carer and supervising social worker will have a supervision agreement which will, amongst other things, detail the frequency of supervision visits. It is a working document which needs to be discussed and reviewed with the foster carer. Managers and foster carers will sign the agreement and retain a copy for their own records. |
| 6.2 | The visiting pattern of the supervising social worker will be set in agreement with the manager and can only be changed with the manager’s agreement. The decision to do so will be based on information, practice wisdom and the experience of the supervising social worker.  Share the care carers or foster carers who just provide Staying Put placements, will be visited a minimum of three monthly. |
| 6.3 | During supervision visits, all areas of the fostering task will be discussed including how the carers are meeting the needs of the child according to their care plan or pathway plan. Information should be shared on any relevant research issues which will support the carer to provide the best possible care to the child. Any action points should be discussed with clear timescales. |
| 6.4 | The supervising social worker may visit the placement to facilitate family meetings when the impact of fostering is affecting the whole family. This will be recorded in the format of Signs of Safety, looking at what is working well, what the worries are and what needs to happen. |
| 6.5 | The supervising social worker will arrange to visit the foster carers own children to give them space to reflect and talk about the experience of fostering and the impact it has on them. |
| 6.6 | Supervision visit records will be completed on Mosaic within five working days of the supervision visit with a copy sent to the foster carers for their own records. |
| 6.7 | The supervising social worker will record all interaction with the foster carer in case notes on Mosaic. |
| 6.8 | The supervising social worker will ensure that the foster carer’s recording is compliant with the policy. They will ensure these records are uploaded onto Mosaic and alert the child’s social worker that they are available. |
| 6.9 | The supervising social worker will support the foster carer to produce life story work for the children they care for. This may take the form of photos memorabilia, written notes, certificates or pictures. |
| 6.10 | Foster carers have the right to request access to their records following the “Your Records, Your Rights” policy for South Gloucestershire Council. |

**Core Standard Seven:** Foster carers, children and young people experience a seamless service

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| 7.1 | Fostering team managers ensure there is an effective duty system and that social work support is always available to foster carers within working hours. |
| 7.2 | Social workers will respond to requests for support or help either by a telephone call, email or home visit. Urgent requests will receive an immediate response, non-urgent requests will be acknowledged within 24 hours, and responded to within an agreed timeframe but no later than 5 days. |
| 7.3 | Out of hours service details will be provided to all foster carers. |
| 7.4 | Supervising social workers will promptly record on Mosaic any information which is important for the child's social worker to be aware of and will alert the child’s social worker that the information has been recorded. |

**Core Standard Eight:** Co-ordination and collaboration with other agencies is effective and promotes good outcomes for children

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| 8.1 | The supervising social worker will read the CoramBAAF form F on allocation of the foster carer to be fully aware of their history, their strengths and development needs and to prevent carers needing to retell their story. |
| 8.2 | Supervising social workers will work closely with children’s social workers, schools, other education providers and health providers to support the foster carers meet the needs of the child in placement. |
| 8.3 | Supervising social workers will seek and obtain feedback from the school, health provider, (where appropriate), and the IRO for all foster carer annual reviews. |
| 8.4 | Supervising social workers will gather feedback from the child’s social worker at the time of the annual review and will escalate if it is not forthcoming. In addition, they will seek feedback when the child moves placement or if concerns arise. |

**Core Standard Nine:** Management oversight and decision making directly contributes to better outcomes for children

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| 9.1 | All foster carers will have a signed copy of the Fostering Agreement. The agreement will set out the core responsibilities relating to policy, procedures, duties and expectations. Agreement will be authorised by a team manager. One copy will be placed on the foster carers’ Mosaic record and one provided to the foster carer for their own records. |
| 9.2 | The team manager is responsible for ensuring that the visiting pattern is adhered to. They will check case notes for supervision recording bi-monthly and it will be discussed at the supervising social worker’s supervision. It is the responsibility of the supervising social worker to tell the team manager if visiting frequencies have not been achieved.  The team manager will organise cover for the visits via a duty social worker should the allocated social worker not be available. A foster carer cannot opt out of visiting arrangements unless it has been agreed by a team manager. |
| 9.3 | Team managers will quality assure recording for content and quality, this will be signed off in a case direction note. |
| 9.4 | Team managers will check that DBS and medical checks are in date and all mandatory requirements are compiled with. |
| 9.5 | Managers will undertake a monthly dashboard audit; any outstanding work will have a case direction with timescales for completion. |
| 9.6 | Dip sampling audits will take place throughout the year, a note will be placed on record to outline any findings and that the case has been audited. |

**Core Standard Ten:** Supervision directly contributes to timely and effective interventions that can respond flexibly to presenting risk and needs

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| 10.1 | Managers offer monthly reflective supervision to all staff. |
| 10.2 | Managers discuss staff development and learning in supervision. |
| 10.3 | Supervision for staff will include case direction which will be recorded on Mosaic. Every fostering household will be discussed in staff supervision a minimum of once every two months. |
| 10.4 | Social workers will have their personal development plan updated every six months. |