



DORSET FOSTER CARE CHARTER

Dorset Fostering Service and Foster Carers have worked in partnership to produce this Charter which sets out the commitment of both parties.

AIMS OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The Fostering Service aims to provide stable and outstanding foster care for children who are valued, supported, and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, it recruits, trains, and approves Foster Carers and delivers ongoing support to them. The Fostering Service works with Foster Carers to ensure they have the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for, and to provide them with stable and loving homes while they are part of their foster family.

THE ROLE OF FOSTER CARERS

Foster Carers are at the heart of the foster care service. They are assessed, trained, and supported to look after children and young people by developing meaningful relationships in a family environment, providing them with stability, care, love and an opportunity to grow and develop, and to reach their potential.

Their relationships with other members of the Fostering Service around the child are based on mutual trust and respect.

This Charter explains what we expect from each other.

THE AGREEMENT

Both parties commit to:

1. Working in partnership
2. Keeping the other informed
3. Communication and consultation

Dorset Fostering Service commits to:

4. Providing a clear statement of the decisions that are delegated to Foster Carers
5. Supervising and supporting its Carers
6. Providing opportunities for learning and development
7. Treating Carers fairly and with respect

Foster Carers commit to:

8. Treating foster children as members of the family
9. Respecting and valuing the child in their care
10. Taking ownership of their own development and access to support



The following sections set out each of these agreements in more detail. The final section sets out how the parties will be held accountable to it, and the means for Resolution in the event of disputes.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Both parties recognise that each has skills and expertise essential for the wellbeing of the child in care. Dorset Fostering Service is the Corporate Parent of the child in care and thus has overall responsibility for the child. Dorset Fostering Service recognises that the skills and expertise of the Foster Carer are what makes the biggest difference to the everyday lives of the children in care.

Both parties will:

- Value the skills and expertise of the other
- Be co-professionals in the care of the child
- Respect confidentiality
- Treat the other party with respect
- Value each other as colleagues
- Ensure that Care and Placement Plans keep up with the child's development and changing needs through effective communication and regular reviews.

Dorset Fostering Service will:

- Ensure that it meets the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and guidance.
- Include Foster Carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for.
- Treat Foster Carers as professionals; and show professional respect in appropriate time keeping and meeting arrangements.

The Foster Carer will:

- Attend all planned meetings in a professional capacity and provide written and oral input as required.
- Be a good ambassador for the Fostering Service.

KEEPING EACH OTHER INFORMED

Information is vital for Foster Carers to provide care that meets the child's needs. Similarly, Dorset Fostering Service is required to be kept informed about important events and incidents in the lives of the children for whom it holds a legal responsibility.

Both parties will work together to agree as much as possible of the Placement Plan in advance of the placement. For emergency placements where the Placement Plan cannot be agreed in advance it will be completed within 72 hours of placement.



Dorset Fostering Service will:

- Give Foster Carers all the information they need in order to care safely for the child before the placement is made.
- Make available online to Carers written procedures and policies that set out in detail the requirements and boundaries of their role.

The Foster Carer will:

- Keep written records detailing day to day information relating to the child or young person as set out in the service procedures.
- Inform both the child's social worker and the fostering social worker as soon as possible about any significant incidents and important events in the child's life.
- Inform the fostering social worker of significant events or changes in the Carer's life or family.

COMMUNICATE AND CONSULT

Both parties agree that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

- Carers will run their own Dorset Foster Care Association (DFCA), supported by Dorset Fostering Service. The aim will be to work co-operatively with a common understanding and shared goals.
- The Dorset FCA will meet regularly with Dorset Fostering Service staff.
- The DFCA committee will be consulted about new policies, procedures and paperwork which will affect Foster Carers.
- The DFCA will provide Foster Carers with an Annual Foster Carer Conference.

CLARITY ABOUT DELEGATED DECISIONS

Dorset Fostering Service recognises that in order for children to live a full family life, the Foster Carer must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

- At the time of placement, Dorset Children's Services will provide clarity about any decision the Foster Carer cannot make and who will make those decisions, including the escalation process if that person is not available.
- The "who decides what" list (delegated authority) will form part of every Placement Plan.
- Foster Carers will make everyday decisions consistent with the care plan.

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

The Fostering Service recognises that fostering is an isolating and challenging task, and that timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and the quality of life for the child in their care.



Dorset Fostering Service will:

- Provide a duty support service and an out of hours emergency service.
- Provide formal supervision at agreed intervals and additional support visits as required.
- Provide Foster Carers with access to Foster Talk support services (independent mediation and advice).
- Provide support groups for Foster Carers.
- Support the Dorset Foster Care Association.

Dorset Fostering Service recognises that Carers' needs for support will vary according to time and circumstances. We have put in place resources to provide additional support where Carers are experiencing difficulties or particular challenges. This includes our Fostering Support Workers.

The Foster Carer will support this commitment by:

- Attending consultation and support groups wherever possible.
- Supporting the Dorset Foster Care Association (if they are members).
- Being supportive of other Foster Carers formally and informally.
- Prioritising supervision.

TRAINING AND LEARNING

Required training for Foster Carers is set out in the Foster Carer agreement in the Provision of Training and Support section. This section deals with additional training.

The Fostering Service will:

- Consult with Foster Carers each year concerning the additional training they require. This could include issues such as:
 - i) Supporting the mental health of children who are in care
 - ii) Trauma-informed practice
 - iii) PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) Parenting Approach
- As part of the Foster Carer Annual Review create a Personal Development Plan with the Foster Carer, setting out their training goals, and the means by which these shall be met, for the coming year.
- The Service will endeavour to ensure that requested training is made available to Foster Carers, individually or in groups.
- On an ongoing basis seek new training and resources that can strengthen the work of Foster Carers.

FAIR TREATMENT

Dorset Fostering Service will:

- Treat Foster Carers with respect, keep them informed, and provide them with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation.

- Provide a written procedure for the management of an allegation including agreed time scales and payment to the Foster Carer during the investigation process.

THE CHILD AS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY

All children have a right to a family life under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Foster Carers will:

- Welcome children into the family and will respect and nurture them as family members.
- Support and encourage education through partnership with schools, attend Personal Education Plan and Parent Evenings, and through having a positive influence on decisions made that may affect the child's educational future.
- Work with the Virtual School staff within Dorset Council to prevent exclusions and ensure excluded children have access to appropriate education provision.
- Support the physical and mental health and well-being of all young people in their care as set out in the Foster Carer Agreement.
- Provide the children's nutritional requirements as per healthy living guidelines.
- Foster Carers will recognise and value the importance of the child's birth family and promote appropriate family time and relationships.
- Foster Carers will encourage and support children to pursue their own interests by facilitating their participation in clubs and societies as appropriate.

The Fostering Service will support this commitment by:

- Fulfilling its responsibilities as Corporate Parent.
- Helping Foster Carers to plan and deliver settled and stable fostering placements that (where appropriate) give the child a sense of permanence.
- Providing training to enable Foster Carers to meet the changing needs of placed children.
- Where feasible, enabling Foster Carers to access additional support or specialist services when placements are difficult.

RESPECT FOR THE CHILD

Both parties agree that every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations.

Foster Carers will:

- Respect and promote a child's religious, linguistic, and cultural heritage. Foster Carers will provide equality in gender, sexual orientation, race, and all other areas.

- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as they would to their own children, and in accordance with the National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Encourage the children to take part in the Children in Care Council provided by Dorset Council, giving them an opportunity to take part and voice their opinion.
- Provide the child with pocket money in line with the Council's policies.

The Dorset Fostering Service will support this commitment by:

- Ensuring the child is listened to and has a voice in decisions made for them.
- Where it is necessary to move a child to a different placement or setting, the child's social worker will share all relevant information with the child and support them through their move.
- Giving examples of how a child's religion, linguistic and cultural heritage can be promoted within the care plan.
- Encouraging equality in dealings with Foster Carers and children in care
- Ensuring the child has the opportunity to influence decisions at Statutory Review Meetings and other planning sessions, including access to independent advocacy.
- Recognising that the foster carers' own children are part of the foster family and respect and support the role they play.
- Showing respect and value for children of all abilities and disabilities.
- Giving a voice to children in care through the Children in Care Council.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both parties recognise the need for Foster Carers to access training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need to support the children in their care.

Foster Carers will:

- Take ownership of their individual and collective training needs, suggesting to the Fostering Service topics that will benefit their caring role.
- Attend training as detailed in their Foster Carer Review and Personal Development Plan which will include mandatory and refresher courses as well as relevant specialist training.
- Utilise the Safe Care training and documentation to help prevent unfounded allegations.
- Complete the required Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within 12 months of first approval for mainstream foster carers and 18 months for connected carers.
- Attend support group meetings wherever feasible



ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESOLUTION

This Charter may be used as a point of reference in supervision, support, and consultation meetings. If a Foster Carer or a Fostering Service employee believes that the Charter is being breached, they should in the first instance raise this with the Carer or employee they believe is responsible for the breach.

If informal resolution is not successful, Foster Carers should use the Dorset Council Complaints Procedure. Fostering Service employees should raise the matter with their manager.