**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Contact with Parents, Siblings and Others**

**Maintaining contact with key people**

* It will be in the interests of the majority of children who are looked-after to maintain contact with their families and friends.
* Both the arrangements for contact and any contact details (telephone numbers etc.) must be included in the placement plan agreed between the Registered Manager and the child’s social worker and updated regularly.
* Details around contact will also be included within the child’s Support Plan, Safety Plan and other core documents where appropriate.
* There may be circumstances where children’s homes staff assess that restriction of contact is necessary in the interests of the child, to safeguard them or promote their welfare. This decision should not be taken lightly and must be agreed with the social worker, where possible, except in an emergency situation, where the placing authority must be notified within 24 hours.
* Appropriate forms of contact should be promoted and facilitated for each child, including, where appropriate, visits to the child in the home; visits by the child to relatives and/or friends; letters, emails and texts; use of social media and other forms of contact via the internet.
* The Registered Manager must consider the contact needs of children, as set out in their relevant plan. Sometimes, children’s homes can be a significant distance away from the child’s home, making agreed face to face contact with friends and relatives difficult. Wherever possible, staff should work with the child to help them understand why face to face contact with their friends and relatives may be less frequent than they would like. Other options may be explored such as Facetime.

**Supporting contact – visits to the children’s home**

* Children may invite friends and family to the home but these are arranged to take place outside the school day in order to support their attendance in education.
* When arranging visits, children should be supported to understand the possible impact of visitors on other children resident in the home. On occasions, visits may need to be arranged taking this into account.
* Staff must be vigilant that any visitors to the home comply with the health and safety measures in place and do not bring or leave any items that are identified as representing a risk to the child following their visit.
* Visitors must sign in and out of the Visitors Book and show identification where appropriate.
* If face to face contact is assessed as requiring supervision, an external staff member may be supplied by the child’s allocated social worker for that purpose. All external staff must adhere to the Visitor’s Policy and other related policies regarding behaviour and conduct.

**Supporting Contact – telephone calls**

* Children’s homes have a duty to provide access to a telephone that children can use privately. Therefore, all children will have access to a phone which can be taken to a private area. This could be the home’s landline or a dedicated mobile phone.

**Supporting contact – letters**

* Children enjoy receiving mail from others and are therefore also encouraged to make contact themselves with families, carers and friends by letter. This is an important and effective way of supporting their progress and development in literacy.
* The placing local authority may restrict letters to certain individuals for safeguarding reasons.
* Where there are concerns about the contents of incoming or outgoing mail, this is recorded and raised with the child’s social worker and any agreed follow up action confirmed.
* Where there is a court order restricting face to face contact, the Local Authority must agree to letterbox contact. If there are any concerns, outgoing mail may be sent to the social worker to check/agree and pass on.

**Supporting Contact – Digital communications and social media**

* The use of digital communications (including e-mail, text messages to personal mobile phones, social media websites, messaging services or any other electronic means of communicating information with others) is to be agreed between the child, their social worker and the home’s Registered Manager, with necessary restrictions in place as required.

**Links to related resources:**

Behaviour Management

Building Positive Relationships

Guide for Visitors and Parents

Staying in touch, safe use of the internet, social media and taking photographs