**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.

**Building Positive Relationships**

**Skills for relationship-building**

* Children living in children’s homes are likely to have experienced difficulties in maintaining positive friendships, either through a lack of skills in this area, or multiple changes of location associated with placement moves. This group of children may also have complex emotional needs arising from negative past experiences that make positive relationships even more important to their wellbeing.
* Children may need to re-learn the skills and strategies necessary to build and maintain positive relationships with others. Staff can often be a safe and appropriate route to test out new skills.
* Children will be encouraged to develop and practice their skills within the home, understanding that staff have a duty of care to maintain professional boundaries, so cannot act in a reciprocal manner in the way a child may be seeking. These situations must be handled sensitively in order to preserve the child’s self-esteem.
* Children will be supported to understand how to build friendships with other children that incorporate trust, communication and care. Children will explore the concept of fairness and reciprocity in friendships and gain insight into appropriate application of this in their own lives.
* Staff will understand and help children to understand what makes a healthy, nurturing relationship. Staff will be skilled in recognising the signs and provide support to children in danger of or involved in exploitative or damaging relationships with others and where possible prevent these types of relationships.
* Staff will be skilled in understanding the range of influences that friendships can have and should encourage those with a positive impact and discourage those with a negative impact. Children will be encouraged to develop these skills for themselves through experiential learning where appropriate.
* Homes that care for children who have, or are likely, to demonstrate sexually harmful behaviour will establish the extent to which friendships can be supported, in line with the child’s relevant plans and subject to the safety of all concerned, including colleagues across a number of different agencies.

**Positive Behaviour**

* Expectations of standards of behaviour will be high for all staff and children in the home. These standards will be clear and unambiguous.
* Children will be supported to develop understanding and empathy towards each other. Positive behaviour and relationships will be reinforced, praised and encouraged; poor behaviour will be challenged and discussed.
* The development of safe, stable and secure relationships with staff in the home will be central to the ethos of the home and support the development of secure attachments that, where appropriate, persist over time.
* Where positive relationships exist between children and staff this will be respected and maintained as far as possible when making any decisions to alter staffing arrangements.
* The registered person will respond to children’s views about changes to staff and be aware of the potential impact this may have for the child’s stability and emotional well-being.
* Staff will understand factors that affect children’s motivation to behave in a socially acceptable way. Staff will encourage an enthusiasm for positive behaviour through the use of positive behaviour strategies in line with the child’s relevant plans.
* The capacity and competence of staff to build constructive, warm relationships with children that actively promote positive behaviour, provides the foundations for managing any negative behaviour.
* Staff will have the skills to respond to each child’s individual behaviour. Where necessary they will manage conflict, maintain constructive dialogues and react appropriately if challenged by a child in their care.
* Staff supervision must enable staff to reflect and act upon how their own feelings and behaviour may be affected by the behaviour of the children they support.

**Bullying**

* Staff will understand what they must do to prevent bullying of children by other children or adults.
* Staff will be able to recognise and address different types of abuse such as peer abuse, cyber-bullying and bullying in day to day relationships in the home.
* The Registered person will ensure that procedures for dealing with allegations of bullying are in place and staff have the skills required to intervene, protect and address bullying behaviours effectively. (See regulation 34(3) on the WSCC policy for the prevention of bullying.)
* Staff may consider managing certain relationships by limiting the interactions between those children.
* Staff will also consider how to support children to sustain the friendships they already have outside of the home, for example encouraging friends to remain in contact or visit if it would meet an expressed need of the child in care where appropriate.

**Links to related documents:**

Countering bullying and peer abuse

Physical Contact with a child

Staff Expectations