

Manual:	Foster Carers Handbook;
Title:	Planning and Placements (Foster Carers) (FCH/019)
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PLANNING

The Children Act 1989 and research have highlighted the importance of planning in achieving successful placements.

Principles Underpinning Looked After Services:

- We recognise the child or young person's right to be looked after in accordance with a proper assessment of need.
- It is expected that families of children will have been offered an opportunity to prevent entry into care through the conveniency of a family group conference
- We will ensure that when a child or young person is accommodated this will, wherever possible, be the result of a positive choice which is intended to meet their assessed need.
- The decision will have been made wherever possible with the agreement of the young person and their family and other significant adults.
- All requests to accommodate a child/YP will have been endorsed by the Placement Recourse Panel.
- Any placement of a child or young person in accommodation should be part of a process that can be demonstrated as the best way in which the objectives of the written Care Plan can be met.
- All placements of a child or young person in accommodation will be accompanied by an appropriate written assessment of need ie an initial assessment in the case of emergency/unplanned admissions and a core assessment where a period of being 'looked after' is required.
- The Integrated Children's System documentation will be used for all children looked after.
- The educational needs of children and young people are of primary importance. These will be respected where accommodation or placement change is being considered.
- Any placement of an individual child or young person must be sufficiently compatible with the needs of the other young people already accommodated in that setting, the needs of the other young people must be respected and considered.
- As far as possible the service offered will enable the child or young person to remain within their home area.

Therefore we aim to:

- Provide planned responses to children and plan the placement of a child in a foster home.
- Minimise the number of emergency placements.

Planning and preparation for placement will ensure that everyone has clear expectations of the placement and understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

Planning a Placement in a Foster Home

When a Social Worker recommends in his/her assessment that a child's needs would be best met by being placed with foster carers a Planning Meeting should be convened.

This meeting must decide whether placement in a foster home is the best way of safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare and:

- Formulate a Care Plan with the child and his/her parents.
- Clarify the reason for placement, the purpose of the placement, the expected length and how it should end.
- Identify a group of people who will monitor the Care Plan, which will include the child, parent/s, Social Worker, foster carer (once identified).
- Child's needs risk assessment/ and management and matching considerations.

The Fostering Officer in consultation with the child's Social Worker is responsible for selecting the most appropriate foster carer/s.

To appropriately match the foster carers consideration will be given to the following:

- Do the skills and experiences of the foster carer/s match the needs of the child?
- Can the foster carer/s offer a placement at this moment in time?
- Is the placement appropriate to any other child already placed in the foster home and the foster carer's own children; is it likely to adversely affect any of these children in any way. Following consultation with the Social Workers of any other child placed?
- Are there any practical issues which need to be resolved before a child can be placed?
- Carers ability to meet the child's needs and risk management?

Any child already placed, in the foster home and the foster carer's own children should be involved in this decision making process as far as is possible and appropriate by the child's supervising Social Worker and the Fostering Officer respectively.

The foster carers must be given sufficient information to enable them to reach a decision as to whether they can offer a placement, including risk assessment which included evaluating risks around contract issues.

Once it has been agreed to proceed with the placement the child's supervising Social Worker will arrange a pre-placement meeting with the fostering officer and foster carer.

Pre-Placement Meeting

The aim of the pre-placement meeting is to plan and co-ordinate the child's placement with the child, their parent/s, the Social Worker, the foster carer/s and any other relevant person present.

Planning and preparing for placement will clarify roles responsibilities and expectations of all those involved in the placement and will reduce the trauma and confusion for the child.

The pre-placement meeting must:

- Formulate the Placement Plans. The Placement Plans must be based on the Care Plan for the child as agreed at the Planning Meeting.

- The Placement Plans will be used to ensure that all the relevant areas are addressed. The Placement Plans are composed within the placement inform record.
- Ensure that the Social Worker requests a health assessment/medical for the child before they are placed or as soon after as is possible, unless the child has had a medical within the preceding three months or is of sufficient age and/or understanding and refuses an examination.

Formulate introductory plan. Introductions will make placement less stressful for all concerned and should include:

- Visit by the foster carer/s to the child and family in their home, where appropriate.
- Visits by the child and parent/s where appropriate to the foster home.
- Every member of the foster carer/s household should be included in these introductory visits e.g. other children already placed and the foster carer's own children.
- Confirm risk/assessment management plan that the appropriate forms (Referral and Information Record, Information Record Placement, Placement Plans and Care Plan) are completed either before or on the date of placement.
- Arrange a date of placement.
- Arrange the date of the next Planning Meeting/first review.

PREPARING FOR PLACEMENT

Gathering information and giving information is crucial to successful placements and minimising disruptions.

Foster Carers Family Book

In some instances, particularly if you are interested in becoming permanent foster carers, you may have been asked to produce a Family Book during the assessment with the Fostering Officer. This book can be used:

- To present your application to foster to the Fostering Panel.
- To help introduce you and your family to a child and his or her parents.

Some suggestions about the Family Book include has a description of you, your family, your home and your extended family in words and pictures. In addition it would be helpful to have an outline of family routines and family safer care policy. e.g. mealtimes, eating arrangements, bedtimes, family hobbies, activities and interests, whether children are expected to help with ability-related tasks, what you would like to be called by a foster child, pictures and a description of the child's bedroom, whether night lights are permitted, whether you have a regular baby-sitter, family pets, etc. Your Fostering Officer will be happy to provide, discuss the kind of information which should be included.

The Family Book will only be used with your permission to enable placement introductions to occur. Occasionally you may be asked to give your permission for your Family Book to be used in the training of other foster carers, to give them ideas of what to put in their own Family Book.

Preparing the Child

The child's supervising Social Worker's in discussion with the Foster Officer will:

- Give information to the child, their parents and others who are important to him/her about the foster carers.
- Ensure they fully understand the nature of the placement and the plans. This will help clarify expectations, roles and responsibilities.
- Prepare the child and parent/s for placement. This includes introductions between the child and the foster carer/s. Preparation and introductions need careful planning and sensitive management.
- It is important that the child can take some possessions to the foster home as possible, in particular toys, clothes, comforts which are important to him/her. This will ensure the child can invest strange surroundings with some degree of familiarity. The transport of a child's possession should be done using appropriate luggage.
- That the child is given and is helped to understand the following:
 - The children's guide which includes advocacy services and how to make a complaint.
 - That the child is given explanations, verbally and in writing about their placement in a way which is appropriate to their levels of understanding and their cultural and communication needs.

The child's supervising Social Worker will also ensure that he/she accompanies the child/s parent/s to the foster home on at least the first visit and in accordance with agreed arrangement within the placement plan.

Placement Planning meeting should happen prior to placement or within 72 hours after placement has commenced.

Preparing the Foster Carer/s for Placement

The child's Social Worker must ensure that the foster carer/s receive full information on the child. This must include the plan for the child in preparation for the placement and to enable the foster carer to appropriately meet the child's needs. This includes:

- Relevant information which could assist their understanding of the situation.
- Full information about the child's health history, current health needs and arrangements for health care and clear information about consent to medical/dental treatment.
- Issuing the appropriate forms following, before or on the day of placement.
- Sharing information between the child, their parent/s, the foster carer/s concerning:
 - The child's rights and responsibilities.
 - What behaviours are acceptable and which are not acceptable.
 - The purpose of managing behaviour and boundaries, which ones may be used and how.
 - The procedures for children who run away or who are not at their proper place.
 - The relevance of physical contact/touch to the child.
 - Any particular arrangements the parent/s would wish to be carried out.
 - How parents will be kept informed about the young person's progress, or any problems which arise.

The fostering officer is responsible for:

- Ensuring any equipment for the child is provided e.g. bedding, pushchair.
- Whether the child's placement will involve the foster carer/s in additional expense and whether these costs should be met by the relevant team responsible for the child.

DAY OF PLACEMENT

The child's Social Worker must ensure that either before or on the day of placement:

- The foster carers, the parent/s and the child are given a copy of referral, information record, placement information record and risk assessment.
- Consent to medical/dental treatment.

NOTE: the foster carer's address must be given to any person with parental responsibility. It can only be withheld if informing a person of the whereabouts of the child would prejudice his/her welfare.

(Paragraph 15 (4) of schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989).

EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

The placement of a child in a Foster Home should be planned wherever possible.

A child should only be placed in an emergency if:

- He/she is likely to suffer significant harm if a placement was not provided.
- A Court Order is made and providing accommodation is believed to be the most appropriate way of meeting the child's immediate needs.

In the case of Remand placements, it is recognised that it may be difficult at times to plan in advance. In these situations the child's Social Worker must make planning a priority.

Despite the emergency nature of the placement, it is imperative that the placing Social Worker provides, prior to placement:

- Initial referral, risk assessment and matching referral information record.

The following documentation must be completed by the Social Worker/EDT who places the child and must be available for the foster carer/s at the time the child is placed.

- Placement Information Record.
- Care Plan, wherever possible.
- Risk Assessment

The placing Social Worker must ensure the child is provided with:

- Children's Guide.

Assessing and managing risk is implicit in the work we do with children and families every day for looked after children it is essential that a full assessment of risk is made before a child becomes looked after and that this is renewed regularly. This will help to ensure that the child is matched with the right placement, that their needs will be identified and met and that all involved are safe. It will thus promote placement stability.

If a child is placed out of hours, EDT will inform the fostering service and the child's Social Worker of the placement.

A date must be set for a Planning Meeting which must be arranged within 48 hours of placement or within 72 hours of placement if the child was placed during a weekend.

CHILD'S REVIEWS

The Care Plan for every child who is looked after must be reviewed at specified intervals.

- The first review should take place within 28 days of the placement.

The second review should take place no more than 3 months after the first one.

- Subsequent reviews should take place at no more than 6 monthly intervals.

A child looked after review is a meeting to review the care plan. The child should always be encouraged and supported to attend and complete relevant documents.

Independent Reviewing Officers chair all Looked After Reviews.

As carers, you will be expected to attend and complete relevant documents prior to the review, to attend all reviews whilst a child is placed with you, and you will be asked for your views before the review. You will be given a 'Consultation Paper for a foster carer, residential worker, or independent visitor' for completion before the review. This will help to focus on specific areas and information required.

It may be appropriate for Looked After Reviews to take place in your home (with your permission) or at a Children's Care Locality Office, or elsewhere. If you are likely to need child care help to enable you to attend the review, you should discuss this with your Fostering Officer.

FOSTER PLACEMENT AGREEMENT

Placement Agreement Guidance

Legal Context

The Placement Agreement is part of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. All Services working with a child who is fostered need to comply with these Regulations.

When Must a Placement Agreement be completed?

The Placement Agreement process is set out in the Children Looked After procedures. The meeting must take place within 5 working days. A Placement Agreement is a requirement under Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations and Care Planning Regulations and must be evidenced as completed for every placement.

The Placement Agreement Supports Placement Stability

The Placement Agreement sets out key arrangements to support placement stability. The placement agreement gives clarification of responsibilities and expectations in relation to each foster placement

Completing the Placement Agreement

To ensure duplication is avoided the Placement Agreement document must be informed by the Placement Information Record (PIR). If the necessary information is present in the PIR then there is no need to repeat the information, just indicate YES/NO on the placement agreement document (when undertaking the placement agreement the completed PIR must be

considered alongside). A placement agreement meeting can be combined with a care planning meeting.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The Plan of Action at the back of the Placement Agreement must be completed indicating any information that is not available at the point of the placement agreement meeting with the child's Social Worker, Carer and where appropriate the young person and any relevant others. The Action Plan must indicate time scales for information identified as required and a review date for the placement agreement. The Placement Agreement must be reviewed after any serious concern or incident or if the child and young person's needs change significantly, or before the date the placement is due to end (if the placement is to continue).

A copy of the completed placement agreement needs to be given to the foster carer and that party to the placement agreement.

The Placement Agreement meeting can be integrated within a care planning meeting where this is deemed appropriate. It is important that the risk assessment is given to the foster carer and the safe care policy is agreed with the social worker.