



Sefton Fostering Handbook

A Guide for Foster Carers

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This handbook has been developed to support you in your important role as a foster carer. It clarifies your role, and the roles of others involved in the care of children and young people who are looked after by Sefton Council.

General Rights for Children and Young People.

- To receive the best possible high-quality care, which promotes equality and rejects all forms of discrimination, including those based on disability, sexuality, race, colour, sex, religion, or ethnic or social origin.
- To family life, preferably with their own family, but if this is not possible then with a foster family.
- To develop and positively fulfil their physical, intellectual and emotional potential.
- To be free from all forms of abuse and exploitation.
- To be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
- To be treated in a way that is appropriate for their age and level of understanding

All children looked after by our foster carers will be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

Foster carers are expected to role-model non-judgmental, anti-discriminatory, and anti-racist practice always and challenge any discriminatory statements or behavior. Furthermore, the foster carers will show understanding and will gain knowledge of a child's background so as to actively encourage them to maintain their cultural identity and practices, where possible.

The foster carer must treat all children/young people equally, valuing, protecting and nurturing the child/ young person as their own. If applicable and unless the care plan dictates otherwise, the same house rules will be applied equally to the foster child as to the foster carers' own children and should be age appropriate.

House rules and the child/ young person's boundaries must be clear and realistically set through negotiation, so that a sense of security is established. The foster carer will create a non-rejecting, non-threatening atmosphere, which allows mistakes to be made but also encourages responsibility for one's actions.

The foster carer must appreciate the importance of a child/young person's contact with their birth family and where appropriate, in accordance with the care plan, will encourage a warm and positive relationship. The foster carer will never criticise a child's birth family, and will always offer understanding, and promote positive aspects of a child's family.

Foster carers will be positive towards a looked after child's achievements both academically and recreationally. The foster carers will take a keen interest in a child's progress at school, in their hobbies and in their social groups, as they would do with their own child.

Sefton Council strives to equip it's looked after children with the confidence to grow into independent young adults, knowledgeable about their past and secure in their identity. Foster carers have the key role in helping to achieve this through encouraging them to make informed choices and take responsibility for themselves, encouraging routine and self-discipline.

All foster carers must possess the parenting skills and relevant knowledge of child development and childcare practice to meet the above standard. They will be provided with advice and assistance from their supervising social worker if they are unsure of the appropriate response, thus allowing them to fulfil their role efficiently. Ongoing training and supervision will ensure the development of their competencies.

All foster carers will take into account the foster child's previous parenting experience. They will be provided with all available information on a child/ young person.

The foster carer will always be expected to know where the foster child is and what time they are expected home. They will be expected to follow the procedures for reporting a child missing and take all necessary steps to locate the young person and encourage their return.

In Sefton, we believe that in order to promote the best chances of success when placing a child with carers, advance knowledge, information and preparation is crucial. This applies to all parties involved – the child, the carers, the placing authority and our agency. Lack of knowledge and planning around a placement can raise anxiety and/or leads to incompatible matches, which can put significant strain on the placement from the start.

Information shared by the local authority about the child enables initial preparation by providing Sefton's carers an insight into the young person's background, risks and presenting needs. Such knowledge enables carers to respond and prepare for the young person's placement in a 'needs led' and child focused manner. It also allows the Council to ensure all necessary support and services are built in to the placement.

Information on the carers helps reassure the child/young person that we are able to meet their needs. Where possible we encourage a formalised transition process, where introductions to the carers can be made prior to placement, to minimise the potential for worry and anxiety for the child/young person(s).

FOSTERING SERVICES – THE LEGAL CONTEXT

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the 2013 amendments, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.

Ofsted regularly inspects all fostering agencies to ensure that these standards are being met. Local authority services including child protection and services for children who are looked after are now inspected under a single inspection framework. Ofsted requires all foster carers to co-operate reasonably, and to allow them to visit and carry out interviews.

Every fostering service is required to have a clear statement of its aims and objectives and of the facilities and services it provides through a statement of purpose.

What are the National Minimum Standards?

The development of National Minimum Standards for foster care are among several national initiatives designed to produce better outcomes for children and young people cared for away from home.

The Standards:

1) The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are considered in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and considered.

2) Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

- Children have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background

3) Promoting positive behavior and relationships

- Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

4) Safeguarding children

- Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse, and accident.

5) Children missing from care

- Children who go missing from foster placements are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return.

6) Promoting good health and wellbeing

- Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they can access the services to meet their health needs.

7) Leisure activities

- Children can enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities.
- Children can make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community.

8) Promoting educational attainment

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

9) Promoting and supporting contact

- Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives.

10) Providing a suitable physical environment for the child in care

- Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

11) Preparation for a placement

- Children will be provided with a profile in respect of their prospective carer prior to the placement commencing. Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued. Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the foster carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met, and they benefit from a stable placement.

12) Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

- Children are prepared for and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing. Foster carers who offer placements to young people aged 13+ are provided with Preparation for Adult Life Training.

13) Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people in care

- The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.

14) Foster Care Panels and the Fostering Service's Agency Decision Maker

- The Foster Care Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

15) Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed needs

- The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement

16) Statement of purpose and children's guide

- Children, their parents, foster carers, staff and the responsible / placing authority are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering service and what services and facilities it provides.
- The fostering service's operation meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose.

17) Fitness to provide or manage the administration of a fostering service

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service.

18) Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity

- The fostering service is financially sound.
- Where a service is to close or substantially change, there is proper planning, to make the transition for children, foster carers and staff as smooth as possible.

19) Suitability to work with children

- There is careful selection of staff, fostering households, volunteers and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a Foster Care Panel and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children.

20) Learning and development of Foster Carers

- Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively.

- A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs.

21) Supervision and support of Foster Carers

- Foster carers receive the support and supervision they need to care properly for children placed with them.

22) Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

- Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children and the person making the allegation and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

23) Learning, development and qualifications of staff

- Children and foster carers receive a service from staff, volunteers and Foster Care Panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs

24) Staff support and supervision

- Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high-quality service to children

25) Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

- The fostering service is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.

26) Records

- Records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child's life

27) Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

- The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose.

28) Payment to carers

- Payments to foster carers are fair and paid in a timely way.
- Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them.

29) Notification of significant events

- All significant events relating to the health and protection of children in fostering placements are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities.

30) Family and Friends as Foster Carers

- Family and Friends Foster Carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

31) Placement Plan and Review

- Children are cared for in line with their Placement Plan/Short Break Care Plan.
- The fostering service acts to chase up outstanding reviews or visits from the responsible authority, contributes to those reviews and assists the child to contribute to their reviews.

Foster Carer's Privacy Notice (How we use your information)

The categories of information that we collect, process, hold and share include:

In the course of approving and supervising foster carers we collect the following personal information from you:

- personal information (such as name, address, contact details, date of birth, gender, language)
- special category characteristics (such as ethnicity, disability, religion and medical information)
- family network and relationship information
- employment information
- financial information
- information relating to assessments and approvals for suitability to foster children previous or current involvement with Children's Services, including Social Care and Early Help.

How we use your personal information

We use your personal information to:

- process foster carer applications
- assess suitability to become a foster carer
- monitor the progress and stability of placements, to safeguard and support children
- provide on-going support, advice and training to foster carers
- prevent or detect crime or fraud
- assess and evaluate our services
- inform future service planning and the commissioning of services
- ensure that foster carers receive the correct payments

We may also obtain personal information from the following other sources:

- The local authority in whose area you live or have lived
- Other Sefton council departments
- Voluntary sector organisations

- The Disclosure and Barring Service
- Past and present employers
- Social media
- References (personal and employment)
- Previous partners
- Health organisations
- Schools

The lawful bases on which we use this information

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 set out what personal data we must obtain from a prospective foster parent and other members of their household and family in seeking to carry on, manage or work for the purposes of a fostering service. The Council relies on Article 6(1)(c) of the GDPR to process your personal data, as the processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which we, as data controller are subject. Some of the personal data the Council must collect is referred to as 'special category' data under data protection legislation. As this data is more sensitive it requires more protection. The Council must therefore also identify a separate condition when processing this type of personal data. We rely on Article 9 (2) (h) of the GDPR in order to process your special category data.

Other pieces of legislation to which the Council must adhere in the course of providing a Fostering Service includes but is not limited to:

The Children Act 1989, the Children and Young Person's Act 2008, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Children and Adoption Act 2006, the Children Act 2004, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Storing this information

We will retain your personal data for only as long as is necessary, in accordance with statutory retention periods and in line with Sefton's record retention schedule.

Who we share this information with

Employees within Sefton Council who have responsibility for recruitment, administration of payment and contractual benefits, and carrying out performance related procedures will have access to your data where it is necessary to their role.

Sefton Council works in collaboration with a number of local authorities and third-party agencies. We may share your data:

- Where you agree to the placement of a child from another fostering service
- We are required to provide your data for the purpose of statutory data collection by external agencies including OFSTED.
- If you apply to another fostering agency for the purposes of fostering or adoption, the agency can ask to see the information that Sefton Fostering services may hold about you.
- Where directed to by the court in any family proceedings.
- Sefton's Fostering panel, Foster Talk, Fostering Network, NSPCC

We will not disclose your information to third parties unless there is a legal requirement for us to do so.

Requesting access to your personal data

Under data protection legislation, you have the right to request access to the personal data we hold about you. To make a request for your personal information contact the Fostering Service on 0151 934 4060 or e-mail: ino.information@sefton.gov.uk

You also have the right to:

- object to processing of personal data that is likely to cause, or is causing, damage or distress
- prevent processing for the purpose of direct marketing
- object to decisions being taken by automated means
- in certain circumstances, have inaccurate personal data rectified, blocked, erased or destroyed and
- right to data portability in certain circumstances
- The right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Information Commissioner's Office)

If you have a concern about the way we are collecting or using your personal data, we request that you raise your concern with us in the first instance. Alternatively, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

If you have a concern about the way we are collecting or using your personal data, we request that you raise your concern with us in the first instance. You may contact Sefton Council's Data Protection Officer at:

E-mail: ino.information@sefton.gov.uk

Telephone: 0345 140 0845

Alternatively, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office directly at: <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>

Further information

If you would like to discuss anything in this privacy notice, please contact the Fostering Service on 0151 934 4060



sefton.gov.uk



Search 'Sefton Council'

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Policy Statement

Foster carers are entrusted with confidential information about children/ young people in their care and learn additional confidential information about children and their families as a result of their work as foster carers. It is the child/young person's right and expectation that confidential information will be respected and safeguarded by the agency. Foster carers are bound by the same expectations of protecting confidential information as are social work staff members. This means that no information learned as a result of their work as foster carers is to be shared outside of that professional service, even if identities are "disguised." Casual conversations about children/young people's information with friends, other foster carers, and others not involved with direct services are prohibited.

Confidentiality relates to the duty to maintain confidence and respect privacy. We also undertake to keep confidential the information which we gather about the subjects of our records and to act responsibly in disclosing information, by ascertaining the legal position and the reason for which the information is being sought. There are legal restrictions placed on us in relation to what information we can hold, how long it may be held for and to whom we can disclose it.

We also have a legal duty to ensure its accuracy. This policy seeks to apply our strategy to the records about children/young people who are being looked after by Sefton M.B.C in foster homes and to provide them with a level of confidentiality which does not breach their human rights.

Policy Information

This policy covers foster carers we approve and the Foster Care Service. It is also to be applied to foster carers approved by another local authority or working for an agency, who look after children for us.

Procedure Details

- All information given about a child who is or who has been placed with a foster carer is confidential. This applies equally to information given as part of a written record, passed electronically or given verbally during meetings and discussions concerning the child or family.
- All information collected by a foster carer, in whatever form, about a child they are looking after, or have looked after, are confidential. Foster carers must avoid collusive relationships with the parents of children who have been placed for adoption to avoid the possibility of disclosing the whereabouts of adoptive placements.
- Confidential information must be stored securely if it is retained in the foster home in the lockable box provided by the fostering service.
- Confidential information must be returned to the child's social worker or fostering

social worker at the end of every placement. All records are the property of Children and Young People's Social Care and are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

- No one will disclose confidential information except where the person to whom it is to be disclosed has a need to know the information. This might include a doctor needing to know past medical details, a teacher needing to know educational history or an organisation needing to know a date of birth or a member of your support network offering alternative care and needing to know your safer care plan.
- Disclosure of confidential information to someone who has a need to know that information must be restricted to the information they need. This should be the minimum amount of information necessary.
- Where there is doubt about a person's need for knowledge, advice should be sought from the child's social worker or the fostering service, before any information is disclosed.
- Discussing the child, their history, their family connections etc. with foster carer's family members, friends and others who do not need to know such details are contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998 and is unlawful. Positive aspects of the child's progress can be shared with friends and family members.
- No matter concerning a fostered child should be discussed in a public place under any circumstances whatsoever. This includes the foyers of Social Services offices, school entrances and doctors' surgeries. Members of the public have access to such areas and your conversation may be overheard.
- Foster carers should also avoid revealing in public spaces that the children in their care are fostered unless absolutely necessary. This generates natural curiosity from people unconnected to the children and makes the task of the foster carer to maintain the child's confidentiality more difficult.
- If fosters carers transport personal information they must ensure it is always secure and confidential and not left unattended in any vehicle.
- A foster carer may seek support from the Fostering service or Foster Talk. In this circumstance carers should endeavor to access a consistent source of support rather than sharing confidential information with several people. At all times the carer should restrict the information shared to that which is needed for them to receive the advice and support they need.
- When a child seeks information about records that are being maintained about them, other than the foster carer's file, they should be referred to their social worker who will arrange for them to have access to their file. There is a process that must be followed in such cases. The social worker will follow the procedures for access to information in these circumstances.
- A child has the right to see what is being recorded about them in the foster carer's file. This does not necessarily include the right to see other documents, such as care plans, child protection conference reports, review reports etc. Where such documents are held on the foster carer's file, advice should be sought from the child's social worker.

- Foster carers must store records on password protected pen drives provided by Sefton and not on their Personal Computers. For further details see [3.11.8 Recording Policy for Foster carers](#)
- Foster carers are encouraged to involve key members of their support network. Prior to attending courses, we ask members of the support network to sign a confidentiality agreement to reinforce the importance of safeguarding children and families' privacy.
- Foster carers seek support from their peers within Support Groups. Issues and themes and foster carers feelings can be discussed and management techniques shared. Sharing personal details is not permitted as it compromises the dignity and privacy of children in our care.
- Where a child has special needs in relation to communication, the fact that records are kept by carers, and the content of the records, must be shared with the child/young person in a way they are able to understand.
- The child's social worker and the fostering social worker have the right to inspect the foster carer's file at any reasonable time. Managers have the right to remove the file at any time. No other person has the right to examine or remove the foster carer's file; this includes the Police and the child's parents, who should be referred to the child's social worker. The child's social worker will be guided by the policy on disclosure of information and such requests must be made in writing.

Photography

Foster carers are encouraged to take photographs as part of the child/young person's Life work. However, caution and discretion should be exercised when taking photographs of children. This includes video recording equipment transferable to DVD, digital images and film. If a child objects to being photographed please do not insist, as their objection may be based on their previous life experience.

Foster carers can retain photographs of their family with a child/young person they have cared for. Foster carers are discouraged to have pictures of all children young people they have cared for on display within their home. Remember, photographs are the personal data of the children and young people themselves.

Children should always be fully clothed when photographed unless they are wearing bathing costumes in natural settings e.g. swimming pool, beach etc. Children should never be partially dressed or photographed in the bath even if they request it.

Photographing children in compromising situations may have been used as a form of abuse prior to being looked after and should therefore be avoided. Digital photographs should not be sent by e-mail as this could disclose the identity of the foster carers and could compromise children who are to be placed for adoption.

There have been instances of birth parents discovering the identity and location of adopted children through accessing digital photographs on the Internet.

Where looked after children/young people take part in group activities e.g. school plays, holidays, youth clubs, foster carers may be given authority to consent to these being published via the decision support tool. There may be safeguarding reasons why this decision remains with the child/young person's social worker. If you are unsure, please check which decisions are delegated to you.

Publicity

Foster carers should not involve looked after children in any form of media publicity or social media e.g. newspapers, radio, TV, Facebook and e-networking, which either discloses their Identity or identifies them as a looked after child.

If a foster carer is approached directly by the media for an interview, they should immediately ask the reporter to contact the Local Authority. In some circumstance's teenagers over the age of 16 and able to give informed consent may agree to give an interview to the media but this would also be arranged through the Local Authority after consultation with the young person's Social Worker.

Confidentiality must always be given the utmost priority and is a clear responsibility of the foster carer. Any breach of confidentiality will be treated as a serious matter.

If a foster carer or a member of their family is found to have breached confidentiality, then consideration will be given to de-registration.

Training for Foster Carers

Sefton Fostering Service recognises that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. The service is committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers. Training is viewed as an important element of support to foster carers and comprehensive pre-and post-approval training is available on an ongoing basis.

- Training is provided to:
 - help foster carers to develop and improve their skills
 - improve knowledge, develop and refine skills
 - establish an explicit, positive framework of values, which promotes equality of opportunity
 - encourage foster carers to be aware of the effects of discrimination in all parts of the community, recognising that they care for children, many of whom face discrimination as a part of everyday life.
 - ensure that all foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm

- help foster carers to promote the health and education of children and young people

Foster carers are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own professional development. This is practically supported through the creation and updates of individual training profiles as part of annual reviews. Children and young people can feed back their views about their carer through the foster carer's annual review.

Payment for Skills

Sefton council seeks to continuously improve outcomes for Looked After Children to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to the achievement of placement choice and are subsequently matched and placed with the right carers.

These factors were at the heart of the Payment for Skills scheme which was developed to operate through a payment model that clearly defined the expectations and in 2011 the scheme was approved by Cabinet for the implementation within the service. There are three payment levels within the scheme Level 1 being the lowest of the payment and three being the highest. The highest level of payment is based on the areas of greatest skills which are required to undertake the necessary tasks.

The payment levels were implemented in 2011 which were linked to foster carers skills knowledge and competencies. There are several fostering households, primarily those approved as family/friend carers who choose not to progress onto the Skills payment scheme.

It is recommended that all carers complete the Skills scheme within two years of beginning their fostering journey.

Carers can achieve Level One payments by attending all the Level One courses and completing the Training Support and Development Standards Workbook.

Carers can achieve Level two by attending all the Level Two courses and the Level Two Workbook.

Ordinarily, to demonstrate your competence as a carer, you need to have successfully completed your first Annual Review to be eligible to apply for Level Two payments.

Carers who have Fostered/ Adopted/had significant professional child care experience can begin as a Foster carer on Level Two. This include teachers, support workers, nursery workers, teaching assistants, youth workers, therapeutic workers or equivalent roles. They will be required to agree to a plan to attend all mandatory, priority and core courses within a condensed timeframe.

Some carers receive enhanced payments due to significant complexity of the needs of the child they care for, previously known as Level Three. There is no training pathway which triggers enhanced payments to be made.

Personal Development Plans

All applicants on their fostering journey should complete alongside their assessing social worker a Personal Development Plan. This logs the training you have attended, need to attend to support you in your role, aid your learning, meet the requirements and guide you in required steps to become eligible for the skills scheme. This will be reviewed each year during the Annual Review Process.

This gives carers an opportunity to discuss any difficulties they may have so that solutions can be found.

Non-Compliance with requirements

If you are not on track to complete the required training as listed above, or planned in your personal Development plan, an action plan will be drawn up to be clear the timescales within which this needs to be completed.

If this is not completed the following actions could be taken if training is not completed.

- Reduction in skills payments
- Review registration at early Review / Fostering Panel
- Decision not to place further children

These measures will only be taken if an action plan is not complied with and with the agreement of the Fostering Service Manager.

Training, Support and Development (TSD)

As part of the training requirement, all foster carers must complete their Training, Support and Development Workbook.

Foster carers play an extremely important role, providing much needed support and security for often very vulnerable children, and enabling their successful transition into independent adult life. Fostering is a challenging role and requires skills and dedication. The Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards form part of a foster carer's induction in the role. They provide a national minimum benchmark that sets out what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12-18 months after being approved. These standards were developed by the sector and were introduced in 2007 and apply to all approved foster carers in England.

Fostering is a challenging and demanding job which requires an ever-increasing level of skill and responsibility. As an approved foster carer for Sefton Council you will have been prepared to a certain degree for the complexities of fostering children of different ages, needs and backgrounds. You may have experience of caring for children - your own or others - in different contexts. However, all children are individuals and children who become looked after having circumstances unique to them. As a foster carer, you will be responsible for providing the child/young person with safe, consistent and compassionate day to day care.

Fostering is both a professional and an intensely personal task, taking a child into your home

and family may have an emotional impact on you and your family.

You are not alone and the working relationship with your Supervising social worker (SSW) will provide essential support. You will also be part of a multi-professional network with the experience and knowledge to support you to best meet the needs of the child/young person in your care.

Sefton Council's Fostering Service is committed to openness and equality, treating all children and families with dignity and respect. No child, family, foster carer or foster family will be discriminated against because of their disability, colour, ethnic or national origins, race, gender, sexual orientation, and political or religious beliefs.

We do hope that if you are a new or experienced carer that you find the handbook a useful reference document. Our Fostering Team are also always on hand to provide any further advice and support.

Thank you for all that you do to support children, young people and families in Sefton.

Different types of foster care



Sefton Fostering recruits, trains and assesses prospective foster carers and connected person's carers. Carers are prepared for the fostering task, and once approved, they continue to be supported, trained and assisted in their development by Sefton Fostering service.

The service works closely with Localities and the Looked After Children's team including the Leaving Care Team, residential workers in Children's Homes, Health, Education and others to ensure that children are placed as appropriately as possible and that the care offered, is of as high a standard as possible, according to the needs of individual children.

There are foster carers offering a wide range of support and care to looked after children and children in need. Other registered carers offer support and care on a more limited basis, this often being more compatible with their lifestyle. These carers are a valuable and nurturing resource for looked after children and young people.

Mainstream/In-house Foster Carers

The core of the carer population is what is currently referred to as mainstream foster carers. These carers are approved and registered for a number of children no more than three, age, and sex of child(ren) and are paid an allowance for the care, nurturing and maintenance of the child(ren) placed with them.

Respite

Respite carers provide support to fostering households in several ways. They may offer regular planned breaks to fostered children. They may offer day care to children placed with other foster carers either on a planned basis or in an emergency, or they could provide a temporary home for children who become looked after for a short period. Carers can be approved as both mainstream and respite carers and this is reflected in their approval.

Emergency care

Emergency care is provided by specified foster carers who agree to take placements out of working hours. Sometimes it is necessary to make an unplanned placement during the day, and any foster carer may be approached who has a vacancy.

Supported lodgings scheme

The Supported Lodging team supervises a group of approved carers who provide supported lodgings and care for young people aged 16 to 21. This scheme is concerned with the development of life skills and the move towards independence.

Independent Fostering Agencies

When the department is unable to provide an in-house foster carer for a child needing a placement, then a placement may have to be made with an independent fostering agency. Sefton Council has developed a preferred provider list to ensure that best value is achieved, and the highest standards are maintained in the services purchased.

Family and Friends (Connected Persons)

The purpose of Family and Friends fostering is to increase placement choice for children by enabling them to be cared for by people they already know (connected persons). The aim is to meet the local authority's statutory obligations with regard to relatives and friends approved as carers. We work with family and friends to build links for the carers in the local community and develop appropriate support for carers and children this includes specific support groups and training.

- **Children and young people:** refers to all children and young people regardless of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage. No child or young person will be discriminated against because of their disability, gender or ethnicity.
- **Foster Carer:** In order to become an approved foster carer for Sefton Council, applicants must demonstrate their commitment to equality of opportunity throughout the assessment process and their fostering career.

Foster carers: are recruited from the general population. We aim to recruit foster carers who are representative of the local community. Individuals, couples and families will be recruited and assessed, with the assessment being taken to the fostering panel for approval, taking account of, and not discriminating against, individuals on the basis of their disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, colour or ethnicity.

Private Fostering

This is when, in a private arrangement children under the age of sixteen (or eighteen, if disabled) are placed by their parents with a person who is not a close relative, for more than 28 days. A close relative is defined as a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, but not cousins, great aunts, great uncles or close friends. The carer, a parent or any other person involved in the arrangement has a duty to notify the Local Authority of the proposed placement and the Local Authority must be satisfied that the welfare of children privately fostered in its area is being safeguarded and promoted.

Staying Put

A staying put arrangement is not the same as a foster placement. The young person staying put, is no longer a looked after child. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a personal advisor. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'. The foster placement becomes a 'staying put arrangement' and is not governed by fostering services regulations.

The 'former foster carer' offering a staying put arrangement may at the same time be offering foster placements to children who are looked after. Such placements will continue to be subject to provisions of the fostering services regulations. In this circumstance, the former relevant child will, as things stand, require a DBS check as they become a member of the fostering household.

Recruitment

The following is a summary of the procedure for the recruitment of foster carers.

Information is easily available and understandable for people to make an informed choice. Information is available from a variety of sources including:

- Community Groups
- Local hospitals, doctors' surgeries and clinics
- Other Social Services and Council premises
- Colleges, schools and universities
- Housing Offices
- Shopping malls and Supermarkets
- Leisure Centre's and Libraries
- Current approved foster carers

Information is currently available in leaflet format and other information packs. If required it can also be made available in large print, audio and Braille for those with special needs and a variety of languages other than English.

Sefton Fostering produces only marketing material that shows, and evidences clearly our commitment to equalities and removing the barriers to accessing our services by all families in the community.

We have a fostering website which provides information about fostering, types of fostering, help and support and allows those wishing to make further enquiries to apply for information on line. This request is then fed through to the Fostering service who sends out an information pack within 48 hours. The enquirer's details are logged and followed-up with a call within 24 hours.

Sefton Fostering also has an outward facing Facebook page which allows members of the public to see some information about Fostering in Sefton and allows them to ask basic questions or request an information pack.

Based on research findings and professional experience Sefton Council strongly believes in the rights and importance of the birth children of our foster carers. We agree with the common view held by children whose parents foster that they are also carers alongside their parents. Research by the Fostering Network has shown that birth children did not think that social workers were interested in them. Moreover, the birth child/ young person often saw the placed child/young person's social workers "as the enemy or not seen at all".

Children who foster can face a number of problems. They can be introduced to illegal or other practices of which previously they had no knowledge. They can be accused of abuse or be abused. Birth children can be traumatised by the comings and goings of difficult foster children, especially if the endings are unsatisfactory or unexplained.

In light of the above, Sefton Council will uphold and practice the following principles in relation to birth children:

- We will ensure that they are actively involved in the assessment process.
- Our assessors will meet with them separately and explain and discuss the fostering tasks and the impact and implications it will have for them.
- Our basic criteria that each foster child must have their own room will ensure that the birth child does not have to share their room with a foster child. Moreover, this will assist in the safe caring process.
- Birth children will be given the opportunity to meet with their supervising social worker on a regular basis. They will be encouraged to share and voice their concerns or complaints. Their views will be treated with respect and dignity.
- Birth children will be provided with 'fun' opportunity, outings etc.
- Training in an age appropriate manner will be provided and will cover the following issues.
- Beginnings and endings of a placement. Welcoming and saying goodbye.
- Confidentiality
- Contact

- Safe caring
- Sharing
- Understanding of foster children/ young person's behavior

All of the above will operate within the context of openness and honesty and the belief that communication, the key element to a family fostering successfully, will be promoted.

Foster Care Fortnight

Foster Care Fortnight (foster care recruitment) usually takes place for two weeks in mid-May. It is a national campaign supported by Fostering Social Workers and foster carers attending organised events.

Volunteering

We value foster carers with fostering events and being part of the recruitment. Foster carers are an essential part of the recruitment process – and carers are exactly who prospective foster carers want to speak to.

Significant changes in the foster carer's family or household

The Fostering Services Regulations require that foster carers notify the department in writing of any significant changes within their family and household.

Listed below are examples of the sorts of changes that are considered significant and that the department would need to know about:

- If a foster carer is planning to move to a new house
- If a foster carer does move to a new house
- If any family member dies
- If any family member, friend or relative joins a foster carers' family
- If anyone is planning to stay or comes to stay in the foster carers' household who has a criminal record involving offences against children, or of violence against the person
- If a foster carers' working hours change significantly e.g. from part-time to full-time or to evening or weekend working
- If there are any changes in a foster carers employment status, e.g. if a foster carer starts or stops working
- If there are any severe marital difficulties, including one partner leaving home (even temporarily)
- If there is a serious deterioration in the health of any family member
- If there is a diagnosis of a serious illness of any family member

- If there is the birth of a child to any family member
- If anyone leaves the family
- If any member of the family is charged with a criminal offence
- If a foster carer has a dog that becomes registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act
- If there is any other significant event which a foster carer thinks it is important to share with the department.

Following notification of any of the above, the supervising social worker will arrange to visit. The supervising social worker will then discuss the change with the team manager to decide whether a review is necessary.

Foster carer agreement

You should receive this when you are first approved as a foster carer. Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations (2011) states what needs to be included within the Foster Care Agreement. It is a document which outlines what is expected of you and what you can expect from Sefton Council. It will also include your approval details on it. Your supervising social worker should go through this with you to ensure that you understand it fully. You should then sign a copy which will be placed on your foster carer file and you should have a copy to keep for yourself.

Statement of Purpose:

All fostering services are required to have a Statement of Purpose (National Minimum Standards 16.1). This must be made available to foster carers which may be in printed format or information of how to access it online. You can access it on the Sefton council website.

Identity Card

You will also receive an identity card. This confirms that you are an approved foster carer for Sefton Council. Please carry your ID card with you when you are with your foster child/ren. This will enable you to prove your identity for example if you are seeking medical attention for the child, or when dealing with the police or other agencies. You will need to return your ID card if you cease fostering.

Confidentiality

There are two elements to confidentiality and the fostering role, one relates to information relating to other individuals outside the child/immediate family. As a foster carer you will meet other foster carers on training and in support groups you will have shared expectations as foster carers to complete specific training or shared tasks if the children placed are linked. All information shared must be treated within the concept of confidentiality.

The second relates to when Looked After Children are placed with you the child's social worker will share full information about the child's background to enable you to care for the child. This information may include details about the child's birth family and the circumstances which led to the child coming into care. Much of the information will be personal and all of it is told to you in confidence.

Who else needs to know

You will need to share some of the information with your children and some family members who are likely to have regular contact with the child. You should know how much your own children can cope with, depending on their age and maturity, use your discretion. It is important to emphasise to your children and family members the need for confidentiality. Breaches in confidentiality may lead to a complaint and could affect your approval as a foster carer.

Who does not need to know

Friends and neighbours, basically it is none of their business. A firm refusal to talk about the children in your care will usually stop questions.

Discussions with other carers

All foster carers are governed by the same principles of confidentiality. It is possible that another foster carer may have experienced the same issues as yourself and you may ask for general advice from them. This would not be breaking confidentiality, but you must not discuss specific details of a child's case or their background.

If the child tells you a secret

A Looked After Child needs a confidant like any other child. However, if the information they share with you is likely to have an impact on their future plans, you should encourage the child to share this information with their social worker and you can offer to help them with this. If the child will not do this, it is essential you tell the child that you will have to share the information with a member of staff from the childcare team.

Some secrets cannot be kept. For example, if a child disclosed that they had been abused or ill-treated you must inform the child's social worker. It is always advisable to tell a child you will listen, and you will help them, but you cannot keep a secret if it is important to their safety and their future.

Disclosures by Foster Children of Abuse

If a foster child tells you about abuse, actual, suspected or alleged, you must speak to the child's Social Worker, Team Manager or the Duty Social Worker immediately or Out of hours you should contact the Emergency Duty Team.

You cannot promise confidentiality. Be careful about making promises you cannot keep. The child needs to be clear that you will have to share what you have been told.

At this point of disclosure let the child know that:

- you are listening and accepting what the child is saying
- the perpetrator's actions were wrong
- it is not the child's fault
- you are pleased the child has told you
- you understand the child is likely to have mixed feelings, and
- what you intend doing next (honesty is very important)

During the disclosure accept and listen. Do not ask leading questions, just feedback and affirm what the child has said. Go at the child's pace.

It is important that you stay calm and reassuring. Try not to react with horror or disbelief. Stay calm and take seriously what the child is trying to tell you.

Continually reassure the child that what the person has done is not acceptable and is not the child's fault.

Try to write down exactly what the child has said, using his/her own words, either at the time or immediately after.

Following disclosure, the involved social work team will take responsibility for the investigation that will follow.

Normally, it will be helpful for the child for you to support him/her during the investigation. If you are prevented from doing this you should ask the Social Worker investigating the case, for the reasons why. You should be aware of your own need for support and should discuss this with your Fostering supervising social worker.

There are other matters which a foster child may disclose to you. For example, if they are abusing drugs or have committed a criminal offence. Again, you must make it clear that you cannot guarantee confidentiality and contact the Fostering supervising social worker for advice.

Child's Social Worker

Every child or young person who is being looked after has a named social worker who is responsible for ensuring that the needs of the child or young person are being met. The social worker will be involved in arrangements which relate to all aspects of the child's or young person's life, for example health, education, contact etc. You should talk with the social worker before making any significant changes to arrangements, particularly if the child or young person is accommodated.

Your relationship with the social worker is very important, as they represent the bridge between the child's past, present and future. You should share all information about the child or young person with the social worker, this will ensure that the best plans are made. Do not feel that you are telling tales, children and young people are rarely simply good or bad. Instead, they are generally reflecting what is happening for them at any particular time. At the same time, you should expect to receive all relevant information about the child or young person to enable you to look after them appropriately.

There are minimum legal requirements for how often social workers should visit children or young people, in their placements.

Personal Advisers

These workers have a significant role in working with all young people over 16 (more often

those over 18) who have left care. They will help the young person to make a smooth transition to independence and will review the pathway plan, which is the plan followed by all those involved in working with the young person. The pathway plan aims to help the young person achieve independence.

The role of the supervising social worker

The role of the supervising social worker is to supervise and support you as foster carers in the important task of caring for children placed with you by the local authority. We recognise that although immensely rewarding this can be an extremely challenging task. Your supervising social worker is here to support you to develop your skill and knowledge base, challenge you, increase your confidence and resilience, and develop your abilities to parent children who have additional needs or who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect.

The supervising social worker is responsible for ensuring that you understand how safe care is practiced within every foster placement and how children and young people are protected from abuse and harm. The worker provides a link between you and the local authority to ensure that statutory regulations and agency standards in relation to foster care policies and procedures are maintained.

As supervisors of foster carers, the supervising social worker is required to:

- Ensure you are informed of, understand and fully comply with, all standards, policies and guidance, including safe-caring guidelines.
- Act as a link between you and the department and will work with others to ensure any difficulties are resolved quickly.
- Help you to develop your skills, establishing your training needs, including completion of the Training, Support and Development Standards workbook for foster carers.
- Ensure you are made aware of, and understand the child protection investigation process and procedures.
- Ensure a supervision record is used at their visit with you, which will be recorded and a copy made available to you for your records.
- Ensure your annual review is carried out each year.
- Ensure that you understand how to use the out-of-hours service.
- Provide support to other members of your household, particularly your children or relatives who are also involved in the fostering task.
- Ensure you know when support groups and local activities are taking place.
- Ensure that statutory checks and references (DBS etc.) are carried out on any person who becomes a member of your household or reaches the age of 18.
- Ensure you are aware of the frequency of statutory checks such as DBS and medicals.
- Help you to make your views heard at meetings, reviews etc.

- If a long-term placement ends in an unplanned way, your supervising social worker will contribute to the disruption meeting, ensuring that minutes of any meetings held are discussed with you and that a copy is placed on your file.
- Ensure you are aware of the department's complaints procedure, and how to use it.
- Undertake an unannounced visit to your home at least once a year, in line with National Minimum Standards for foster care.
- Complete a health and safety check of your home on an annual basis in line with National Minimum Standards for foster care.
- Declare to their manager if they are related to you; are considered a member of your family; are a godparent to any of your children or those of your close relatives; or have any other personal or financial relationship with you.

Whilst a child is in placement, the supervising social worker will

- Visit you to provide support and supervision. In addition, telephone contact will be made with you as required.
- Help you deal with issues arising from placements, such as finance, equipment, insurance issues and transport.
- Ensure that you can complete the relevant diary recording sheets. These will be made available to both your supervising social worker and the child's social worker.
- Support you to carry out the placement plan, assist you in problem solving and dealing with misunderstandings, difficulties or uncertainties.
- Ensure you understand and can work to the child's care plan.
- Attend, placement planning agreement meetings and when agreed appropriate, reviews of children placed with you and any other meetings where you may need support.
- Help you to assist children and young people to understand and value their racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and sexual identity, or disability.

Supervision / Support visits

You are entitled to receive formal and recorded supervision with your supervising social worker at least six times a year, and more frequently if the need arises. You should also take responsibility to contact your supervising social worker at other times should you need advice or support.

The supervision record will be used to assist this process and to make sure that all the areas are covered as required by the Fostering Service Regulations. Your supervision record will be sent to you electronically if you do not agree with the content or any recommended actions then you need to contact your supervising social worker so amendments can be agreed. A completed copy of the supervision form will be kept on your records. The supervision records also contribute to the annual review to ensure all aspects of your fostering year is included in the review report.

Unannounced visits

At least once per year, SSWs are legally required to carry out an unannounced visit to ensure that:

- you are providing a high standard of care
- the home environment is safe and suitable
- the child is safe and well.

Unannounced visits may also take place if there are concerns about the child's safety or welfare or your ability to care for the child. Please be aware that all rooms in your house and any outbuildings and garden will need to be seen as part of this. The unannounced visit will usually be made by your SSW but not exclusively.

Fostering Support Workers

If you need additional support, this can be made available from a fostering support worker who will work closely with your supervising social worker to ensure that your needs for support and guidance are met.

Specialist Support

Sefton has a small Therapeutic Support Team that works primarily with looked after children to support their emotional and mental health. The child in your care may need support to attend appointments with the Team. The Service also works with foster carers to give advice and guidance on emotional health issues and can suggest strategies for dealing with challenging and disruptive behavior arising from previous loss trauma or abuse.

Fostering Duty

The Fostering Service provides a duty service during office hours. A member of staff will be available to respond to any immediate support issues you may have in the absence of your supervising social worker. When a supervising social worker is off sick for any period, you will be informed of alternative arrangements. The fostering duty service is also responsible for coordinating placements of children with foster carers.

Allegations / Complaints

If an allegation is made directly to you about another person's conduct towards a child, you should inform your supervising social worker or the child's social worker. If allegations regarding your conduct towards a child are made directly to a social worker, they have a responsibility to report the information to a Senior Manager and you will be made aware of the allegation or complaint.

Allegations and complaints are occasionally made against foster carers and this places foster carers in a difficult and sometimes distressing situation.

Sefton Council has an investigation and safeguarding procedure which aims to deal with allegations against carers quickly, confidentially, fairly and impartially. This procedure is known as Allegations against Foster Carers and is commenced when an allegation is made against an adult caring for or working with a child or young person.

All allegations about foster carers received by fostering service will be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for the local authority in whose area the foster carer lives; including allegations that on the face of it, may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or local authority.

Wherever possible, the fostering service will ensure that the person against whom an allegation has been made is kept informed of the progress of the investigation. However, there are occasions when due to the nature or seriousness of the allegation the LADO, or local authority child protection team or Police may require the fostering service to delay sharing some sensitive information with the subject of the allegation. Understandably some foster carer's will feel hurt and distressed in such circumstances.

The LADO in consultation with the fostering service and the placing authority will decide on how and by whom the allegation is to be investigated. This may result in implementing

- Child protection investigation procedures, and/or
- Criminal investigation procedures or
- Standards of care investigation procedures or no
- No further action

Investigations into allegations relating to child protection matters will be led by the local authority's safeguarding Services whilst criminal matters will be led by the Police. If the allegation(s) do not meet the threshold for implementing formal child protection or criminal proceedings a Standard of Care investigation will be led by the fostering service or jointly by the children team.

After the investigation of any allegation or complaint a decision will be made as to whether the allegation is found to be:

Substantiated – There is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation. Relevant Conduct has occurred.

Unsubstantiated – This is not the same as a false allegation, it simply means that there is insufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation. The term does not imply guilt or innocence.

Unfounded – There is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made, or there is evidence to prove that the allegation is untrue. It may also indicate the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw. Alternatively, they may not have been aware of all the circumstances.

Malicious/False – There is "clear" evidence to prove that there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false.

When an allegation is made against a foster carer it can be a very stressful time. Your supervising social worker will provide support but will not be able to discuss the progress made in the allegation process during the investigation and this can result in foster carers feeling isolated and unsupported.

To support foster carers through an allegation and investigation the agency have commissioned the services of 'Foster Talk' a Foster Carers Independent Support Service (FISS) that offers locally based, independent advisors to provide face to face support, advocacy and or mediation for foster families during difficult times such as allegations and complaints. A discussion to access FISS is held at the time of the allegation and initially 10 hours support would be agreed by a fostering manager if additional support is required this is discussed and agreed on an individual basis.

What support can the FISS Advisor give?

- General advice about the allegations and panel process
- Give emotional support as required
- Advisors will work on a model of empowering carers to express views, raise question and encouragement to be proactive in their situation
- Non-adversarial, advocacy-based support
- Be a communication link between foster carers and their fostering agency (only if foster carer requires this)
- Be non-judgmental
- Be impartial in the advice they give
- Be confidential (subject to the usual safeguarding boundaries)
- Will not tell the foster carer what to do but will point out objectively advantages and disadvantage of a course of action to allow foster carers to make their own decisions from an informed perspective Spend time prior to a meeting to help foster carer prepare for the meeting
- Attend meeting (such as annual review and panel)
- Help with written responses to reports
- Help to explore what outcome they are hoping to achieve and how realistic the foster carers desired outcomes are.

What is outside of the FISS Advisor role

- Attend meetings in the foster carer's absence
- Pass on information for the agency to the foster carer
- Actively support a complaint
- Attend meetings such as LAC Reviews, Supervision meetings or meeting seen as day to day normal business

- Unless exceptional circumstance speaks for a foster carer in a meeting, and then only with chair approval
- The contact details for Foster Talk are: 01527 836 910

Fostering Allowances

Allowances and fees are reviewed annually and carers will be consulted and informed of any significant changes.

Foster carers are not eligible to receive Child Benefit for a foster child and the fostered child cannot be included in the foster family's claim for benefits or Tax Credits. Carers in receipt of benefits should contact the Benefits Agency to inform them of the allowance and any fees they receive through their fostering role and identify if there is an impact on their benefits. Foster carers cannot claim free school meals for a fostered child. The fostering allowance covers all food costs incurred by the child whilst in placement including school meals or packed lunches.

Fostering Allowances for Looked After Children

Effective from 1st April 2020

Payments are made fortnightly in arrears directly into the carer's bank or building society account by direct bank credit transfer.

Fostering payments are paid from the night the foster placement commences up to and including the night prior to the child leaving the foster home or becoming 18 years of age.

This includes payments to a connected person who has been given temporary approval as a foster carer under Regulation 24 or 25 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The fostering allowance will be paid according to the child's age as if the carer had been approved by the Agency Decision Maker following presentation to the fostering panel.

Birthday Allowance

Birthday allowance is payable equal to one week's standard fostering allowance at the appropriate age category.

Christmas/Festival Allowances

Christmas/Religious Festival allowance is payable equal to Two weeks standard fostering allowance at the appropriate age category.

Initial Clothing Allowance

An initial clothing allowance may be available on a discretionary basis when a child has limited access to clothing & footwear at the commencement of placement. Ongoing clothing costs should be met from the child's weekly allowances.

Pocket Money

The following principles should guide the payment of pocket money to our children and young people looked after:

- Having pocket money is good for the child/young person. It gives a sense of independence
- and a measure of choice in making decisions about how the money is spent.
- Receiving pocket money helps children understand the value of money and is the start of developing budgeting skills.
- The amount to be paid must be clarified and addressed within the Placement Plan at the Placement Planning Meeting.
- In principle children in care and the foster carer's birth children of the same age should get the same weekly pocket money and it would be unfair if foster children received either more or less than the foster carer's own children.
- It is suggested that pocket money is given out on a regular day each week.

- In many families an understanding may be reached that once a child is old enough to help out with basic household chores, top-ups to pocket money can be arranged in exchange for jobs done. In some foster homes this could be appropriate, especially in long term living arrangements where such an understanding and trust could be built up over time. In shorter term living arrangements this may be less easy to achieve or inappropriate.
- As a child gets older s/he may want more expensive extras which can be reflected in pocket money or be paid for by the carer out of the basic allowance received. For a teenager a monthly allowance to cover pocket money, clothing and other larger personal items should be considered (depending on their maturity and situation).
- To promote a child/young person's positive contact with their birth family top-ups to their pocket money will need to be made to enable birthday and Christmas presents to be bought for birth and foster family members.
- When a young person becomes a teenager, a monthly allowance should be considered in their pathway plan to cover pocket money, clothing and other larger personal items should be considered (depending on their maturity and situation) and discussed with them.
- The rate of pocket money paid to young people should be realistic. It is the responsibility of carers and social workers to help ensure the smooth transition to independent living after foster care. It would be unhelpful to this process if a young person's pocket money enabled her/him to enter in to a lifestyle which was not possible if s/he later had to live independently.

Each child/young person should ideally be given pocket money. The amount is at the discretion of the foster carer and should be discussed with the Supervising Social Worker. An up to date guideline is £2.50 pw for younger children aged 2-8 years, £3.50 pw for aged 9-13 and £10 pw for teenagers.

It is not permissible to withhold pocket money for poor behavior as more appropriate strategies should be used.

Passports and Documents

The cost of getting birth certificates (and copies), passports and producing Life Story books will be met by the Children's Service.

Passports

Obtaining the necessary documents to apply for a passport for a child looked after can be a lengthy process. If you wish to take a child abroad you should discuss this with the child's social worker well in advance. The social worker is responsible for obtaining the necessary information and signatures.

If a child is accommodated under Section 20, the parent will need to sign the application; if there is a Care Order or Interim Care Order in place, the Service Manager will sign.

You should be aware that children who are subject to care proceedings may not be taken abroad and that the Service Manager must give written permission for any foster child to be taken abroad on holiday.

Holidays Abroad

If foster carers are considering a holiday abroad with Child/ren, the carer must give the child's social worker plenty of notice of their plans. The legal status of a Child will need to be considered by the social worker and permission may need to be sought from the parents or from the Court which can take some considerable time. Obtaining a passport can also be a lengthy process so it important to discuss your plans in good time so that the child's social worker can embark on making all the necessary arrangements to allow the child to leave the UK. Children's Social Care will pay the cost of the child's passport and a letter of delegated responsibility will also be needed when taking a child in care outside of the UK.

Do not be put off by this list of apparent difficulties. Many carers and the children placed with them have wonderful holidays abroad, but like most holidays make sure you make the arrangements in plenty of time.

Children should not be taken out of school in term time for holidays.

Insurance

You must inform your Home, Building, Contents, and Car insurance company once you have been approved as a foster carer. Tell them about the numbers of children and age ranges you expect to take. You should ask the insurance companies for written confirmation that they have included foster children on your policies. A copy of these letters should be given to your supervising social worker.

Motor insurance

As a foster carer you are required to have fully comprehensive motor insurance for all cars used in connection with your fostering and the policy should also include a business use category. We recommend that all your insurance providers are notified in writing that you are a foster carer.

MOT

Foster carers must ensure they have an up-to-date MOT Certificate for their car if it requires one.

The original, copy or electronic version of the MOT certificate (including advisory notes) needs to be seen by the Supervising Social Worker and noted on the carer's records.

Disability Living Allowance

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) are state benefits available to disabled children who require help with personal care/or supervision over and above that of other children of the same age because of their illness or disability. The benefits may contain both a care and mobility component.

Foster carers who are looking after a child who is entitled to DLA (or PIP) should be supported by the child's social worker to claim the allowance. The child's social worker must be informed by the foster carer if they have applied for DLA or

PIP, along with the outcome of any claim, including the rate payable for both the care and mobility component. Any payment is made by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and is additional to the age-related fostering allowance and any fee payable to the foster carer.

If the child or young person is eligible for DLA or PIP, management and use of the benefit by the carer to meet the additional needs of the child should be discussed and agreed at the Placement Planning Meeting, or through a review of the Placement Plan. Use of the benefit should be reviewed regularly by the child's social worker with all other parties. Where benefit is in place there is an expectation that this will fund additional expenditure required for the care and maintenance of the foster child due to their illness or disability which is not covered by the fostering allowance. Foster carers must be able to tell the child's social worker how they have used the DLA or PIP to improve the life of the child.

DLA or PIP is not intended to be saved for the child to use in adult life, and any savings over a certain limit may impact on benefits claimed by the child's parents if the child returns home, or by the child on reaching 16 years of age. Any weekly surplus of DLA or PIP can be saved for a particularly large expenditure such as a special holiday or anything practical that the child may need.

Under or Overpayment of Allowances and Fees

Whilst every effort is made to ensure correct payments, occasionally the payment of fostering allowances and fees may continue after a child has left a foster home.

It is Sefton's policy that overpayments of allowances or fees are recoverable in full from the start of the overpayment period. Every effort will be made to provide carers with appropriate support to ensure that any arrangement for recovery does not have an adverse impact on any children in placement or cause hardship to the carers.

Where an overpayment has been made, a letter will be sent to the carer from the Finance department advising them of the overpayment and proposing repayment arrangements. The carer will be asked to arrange a bank transfer or send a cheque to repay the overpayment. Carers may request deductions from future fostering payments if this is their preference. Foster carers should discuss any problems with payments, or recovery of overpayments with their Supervising Social Worker.

The occasions when overpayments are made will be few. If carers think they have been overpaid they should contact their supervising social worker as soon as they notice they have been overpaid.

Equipment

Foster carers must be suitably equipped to fulfil their role. When a foster carer is being assessed the assessing social worker will ensure that basic equipment is available to meet the needs of a child or children within the carers' approval range.

When carers do not have basic equipment, Sefton Council will consider providing equipment

considered necessary for the welfare of their foster child. This may include cots, beds, bedding, storage space for children's clothing and personal items, pushchairs, stair gates, car safety seats, etc. All equipment is on loan and, unless worn out, is returnable to the Fostering Service at the end of placement or when a carer resigns or deregisters. If wear and tear has been especially heavy, replacement items will be purchased.

All purchasing of equipment by carers where reimbursement will be requested must be agreed by the Fostering Team Manager in advance.

Delegated Authority

Delegated authority relates to agreements around those decisions about a child looked after's care that can be taken by their foster carer and those decisions that have been retained by the parents or local authority and for which permission must be sought. Delegated authority agreements are discussed and agreed at the Placement Planning Meeting.

Appropriate Adult

All young people aged 17 and under who are arrested for a suspected criminal offence, are dealt with under the guidance of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. This means that they have to be dealt with as young people and not in the same way as an adult offender would be dealt with. This means that any young person, aged 17 and under cannot be interviewed or processed unless in the presence of an appropriate adult.

The appropriate adult, or AA as it is referred to, must be a person over 18 years of age who is deemed mature enough to consider the welfare of the young person in the criminal justice process at the Police station. This will involve sitting in during the interview process. The appropriate adult is not there to substitute for a solicitor or indeed offer legal advice. The appropriate adult cannot be somebody who is co accused in the offence or indeed the victim of the offence.

PACE codes of practice (Sec 21) specify information that the police must make available to an AA and the occasions when the AA must be present. For example, an AA must:

- be allowed to review the custody record as soon as is practicable after their arrival, and on request be given a copy of that custody record;
- be consulted by an inspector at reviews of the young person's detention - be present when the custody officer explains to the child or young person their rights and entitlements while in police custody; and .
- be present when a child or young person is cautioned or charged.

A foster carer can act in the role of an Appropriate Adult for a young person they are caring for providing they are not the victim of the offence.

Culture and Language

Culture describes the way people live their lives. Culture is founded on many different factors, for example; memories, common experience, background, racial identity, religion,

class, language and family attitudes etc.

Culture is part of a child's life, identity and heritage. All foster carers should respect and value a child's cultural heritage.

Foster carers should be aware it is possible that a child whose first language is not English may be placed with them. Language is an important part of a child's identity and culture. Every effort should be made to preserve a child's linguistic and communication skills, otherwise they may lose a part of their culture and feel a sense of grief or loss.

If you need more information about a child's cultural and linguistic needs contact your supervising social worker and the child's social worker and you will be supported.

Babysitting and Alternative Care

Everyone caring for children need a break from time to time and occasionally have to leave their children with relatives, friends or babysitters. As a foster carer, you will have considered your support network as part of your assessment and identified people who are prepared to offer both emotional and practical support, including caring for children when necessary. Following your approval, you will meet other foster carers through support groups, training, and contact between siblings. Many foster carers form relationships which allow them to offer informal support to one another, including caring for children in each other's placements.

The delegated authority given to you means you are able to use your own discretion and judgement as to who may be appropriate and safe alternative carers for any particular child. You will need to be mindful of their needs and the babysitter's ability to keep the child safe, be trusted to maintain confidentiality and competent to deal with any emergency or behavior's that the child may display.

Belongings

Foster children may arrive at the home of a foster carer with items of clothing, toys or other possessions which do not seem very valuable. These possessions 'are the child's link with their separated family and will be important to them – they should be treated with respect and foster carers should make sure that these, and other possessions, move with the child to any other placement. Photographs are particularly important.

It is important, whatever the circumstances under which a child leaves, that their belongings are moved in appropriate suitcases or holdalls, you will be expected to provide appropriate luggage for when a child moves on, this will then belong to the child or young person, in no circumstances should a child move with their belongings in bin bags or similar containers. Children should move with all toys and clothing which has been bought for them during the duration of their time with you.

CONTACT

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote contact between children who are looked after, their parents, relatives and other people who are important to the child. Expectations on promoting contact are also outlined in Section 10 of the Fostering Minimum Standards. Foster carers have a responsibility to promote contact, and the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that carers are in the best position to make contact as safe and enjoyable as possible

for the child. Foster carers are usually expected to provide transport to contact.

The child's social worker is required to provide foster carers with the necessary information about contact including any assessment of risk for those involved. The needs wish and feelings of the children are also central to planning contact. The child's social worker coordinates contact, including frequency, location and the supervision required.

Contact is particularly important for children and young people who are at risk of losing their sense of identity with specific aspects of their cultural heritage. Children with dual heritage or who may be placed with carers who are not a cultural match, need to maintain their links with their family, friends and community so that their cultural history is encouraged and valued.

Children may ask to have contact with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with prior to being looked after. This is often an expression of loss for children and positive steps should be taken to re-establish these relationships if it is appropriate for the child. Contact does not have to be face to face and can take the form of phone calls, exchanging letters or emails, photographs or cards from holidays or special occasions.

Experienced foster carers will know that contact can have its difficulties. In some circumstances, it may be clear that contact will not benefit children or could be damaging depending on the risks involved. The courts have the power to restrict contact if they decide it is not in the child's best interests. Contact can also cause distress for children, and foster carers are often the people who have to deal with this when a child feels confused or disappointed. This can be emotionally difficult for foster carers who feel frustrated that the family is letting the child down, but there are many possible reasons parents and family members find contact stressful.

They may feel guilty or angry that their children are being looked after in foster care. Children are often placed in an emergency when the family is experiencing overwhelming problems and loss of control in their lives.

Parents may also feel they have failed their children, which can affect their motivation and reliability. These feelings may lead to parents behaving in ways which appear inappropriate during contact. They may be very emotional, give their children unrealistic messages or promise gifts.

Dealing with the difficulties this can cause for the child can be hard to manage, but understanding the parents' experience can help to make sense of the situation for the child as well as the family. The Placement Planning meeting, involving the carers and parents, can help parents with their fears and clarify how arrangements can work best for the child.

Foster carers can also make invaluable contributions to the plans for children by recording the behavior of children in relation to contact. This may identify patterns which can contribute to decision making. It is also important that contact is discussed in formal supervision with the carer's supervising social worker so that issues can be shared and hopefully resolved. When it is considered safe and appropriate, it can be beneficial for the carer to facilitate contact either in the carer's home or at an agreed venue. This can increase the child's sense of security, when the people who are important to the child are

comfortable with each other, and can be less threatening for parents and other family members.

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The IRO is responsible for reviewing the care plan for each child or young person who is looked after. No significant change to the care plan can be made unless it has been considered first at a review, unless this is not reasonably practicable. The IRO will chair the statutory review for the child or young person. They need to be informed of any significant changes which may occur between reviews. Such changes, as stated in the Care Planning Regulations (2010).

As foster carers you should be given the name of the IRO for the child or young person you are looking after. Although the social worker should inform the IRO of such changes as the foster carer you are also able to contact the IRO direct if you have any concerns or you consider that actions are not being undertaken when they should be. The IRO can request that an early review should be convened if the changes are significant.

Deprivation of Liberty

The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) were introduced in 2009 (with strong links to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Mental Health Act 2007).

DOLS aim to prevent the unlawful detention of adults in hospitals and care settings (inclusive of foster care) who lack capacity to choose where they live and/or to consent to care and treatment. The Mental Capacity Act, DOLS are compatible with Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to liberty and security of person).

The Supreme Court has now confirmed that to determine whether a person is deprived of their liberty, there are 2 key questions to ask, described as the 'acid test'

1. Is the person free to leave?
2. Is the person subject to continuous supervision and control?

Whether the person objects to the arrangements, and even though the arrangements may be considered to be in the person's best interest, are irrelevant.

This has more recently been applied to a child in a foster placement where legal status was sought to enable the DOLS to be met via 'inherent jurisdiction'. "... the only application the local authority could lawfully make and ruled that the care received by the child did in fact amount to a deprivation of his liberty." This is a very rare occurrence and in this instance the needs of the child were so significant that the court made this decision.

This now means that if a person lacks capacity to consent to the care and/or treatment arrangements, is not free to leave and is subject to continuous supervision and control, they are deprived of their liberty. The judgement also advises that a low threshold should be used in applying the 'acid test' given the vulnerability of people who are likely to be deprived of their liberty and the intention that the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards should

be protective of such people.

The role of the Children's Guardian

A Children's Guardian is a qualified independent person appointed by the Court to represent and safeguard the interests of children and young people who are subject to court proceedings. They are appointed by Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) if the child or young person is in the care of foster carers. The Children's Guardian is likely to make contact to seek the views of the carers. If you would like more information about the role of the Children's Guardian, please contact the child's Social Worker. The job of CAFCASS is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children involved in Family Court proceedings.

The role of the Virtual School Head

The Virtual School Head in Sefton (VSH) is the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked after children, wherever they are placed. The VSH ensures that the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school. This includes, amongst many other responsibilities.

- Ensuring that an effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) system is in place which
- focuses on achieving good outcomes for individual children
- Ensuring that all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities in creating
- high quality PEPs and in promoting good educational outcomes more generally
- Ensuring that children are admitted to suitable schools in a timely way and that systems are in place to support regular attendance
- In Sefton, the VSH leads the Virtual School Team.

Nurse for Looked After Children

Has the key role in coordinating the statutory health assessments for Looked After Children. They work closely with pediatricians, health visitors, school nurses and other health professionals, plus social workers and foster carers, and the children and young people themselves, to promote their health and wellbeing. Children under the age of 5 should have 2 health assessments per year. Those over 5 will have an annual assessment.

All children coming in to care should have an initial emotional health screen completed by the Therapeutic Support Team. Any concerns raised will be followed up by the Team. All looked after children between 4 and 16 should have an annual emotional health screening completed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This is completed by foster carers and included in their annual health assessment.

Annual Review

Every foster carer has a review at the end of their first year of fostering, and then at least once every year after that. The first review will include a meeting, chaired by the IRO for the fostering service. Subsequent reviews will also be chaired by the IRO. This will include obtaining the views of the foster carers and their family, fostered children, parents, if appropriate, and the children's social workers. The supervising social worker drafts a report in preparation of the review meeting and provides a copy for the foster carer and the chair (if it's being chaired independently).

Support to your own children

There is growing awareness of the effects fostering can have on foster carers' own children. Children and young people can themselves make positive contributions to a child's experience of being looked after in foster care. However, it is important to remember that fostering can have an impact on your own children and that at times they may need extra support, encouragement and reassurance because of it.

Foster carers' own children play an important part in the success of fostering, often being the ones who welcome a new foster child into the home and help them to settle in.

However, sharing their home and parents with another child/young person can be hard and foster carers' own children need support to deal with the daily challenges of growing up in a fostering family. Discussions will need to take place about behavior for everyone, what is acceptable and what is not.

When children don't get the support they need, a placement is more likely to break down, which leads to more instability for fostered children.

Remember not to neglect other adult members of your family too - you are all important and need to support each other.

In the future, your children will have been invited to their own children's group as part of the Skills to Foster group, which will have helped to prepare them for fostering. This is dependent on age and their cognitive understanding of their role in a family that fosters.

There will be regular events for 'Children Who Foster' (at least twice yearly) held by the Fostering Team where they can meet with other children and young people who are part of fostering families.

The Legal Framework

The Children Act 1989 is the major piece of legislation which governs our work with children and families.

Court Appearance

Although this is unusual, in certain circumstances foster carers may be requested to give evidence to the Court. Foster carers are expected to keep accurate records during any placement and these will be important if you are questioned in Court.

Attending Court can seem a daunting experience. The child's social worker and your supervising social worker will both offer support and advice and also help to prepare carers before the Court date.

Court Orders

Under the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Family Act 2014, Court Orders are to be used as a last resort. It is not necessary for foster carers to be expert in child care law but it may be helpful to understand some of the more common Court Orders.

Emergency Protection Order (EPO)

This is an order under which children are removed from a situation in which they are at risk of harm. The order must be signed by a magistrate. An Emergency Protection Order can last up to 8 days with a possible extension of up to a further 7 days. After 72 hours from the making of the order, an application for discharge can be made by; a parent, a person with parental responsibility, the child, or anyone with whom the child is living at the time.

Care Order

The Court will make a Care Order if it believes that: a child is suffering significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm, or if the care being given is not what a parent should give, or the child is beyond the parents control, or if making the order will help the child.

The Order will state that the Local Authority must look after the child and provide somewhere for the child to live. A Care Order gives shared parental responsibility to the Local authority and the child's parents.

The Care Order lasts until the young person reaches 18 years of age, or until the child is adopted, or a Supervision Order, or a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order is made, or the Court discharges the Care Order.

Under a Care Order it is presumed the child/young person will remain in contact with their family unless the Court states otherwise.

Child Arrangement Orders

In April 2014, the Children and Family Act introduced Child Arrangement Orders to replace the previous Residence and Contact Orders. This Order directs

- With whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact;
- When a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with any person.
- The person with whom the child is to live acquire parental responsibility this will be shared with the birth parent.

Special Guardianship Order

A Special Guardianship Order provides legal permanence for children for whom adoption is not appropriate. It gives the Special Guardian parental responsibility and the power to make decisions on the upbringing and care of the child to the exclusion of all others (except a joint Special Guardian). Birth parent(s) retain a level of parental responsibility and the child cannot be adopted without their consent.

Guidelines for Foster Carers on HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B

Foster carers have an important role in the care, support and education around the issues in relation to these contagious diseases. These diseases need careful managing to ensure the safety of yourself and your family as well as the young people living with you. You will always be informed if it is known that a child/young person coming to live with you has any such disease, however as we cannot always be sure of the HIV status of a child/young person placed, health and safety guidelines should always be followed as a matter of routine.

The following procedures are common sense precautions, which will protect against a range of minor and major infections, which can be transmitted via blood and body fluids. Most of these infections such as Hepatitis B are far more easily transmitted than HIV. It is essential therefore that all foster carers are aware of these precautions and apply them at all times. Foster carers should maintain the same standards of hygiene for all of the children and young people that they look after.

- You and your family are advised to have yourselves immunised against Hepatitis B. This can be done by your own GP's surgery. Sefton will reimburse you for this.
- Cuts and sores on the hands should be kept covered with waterproof adhesive dressings.
- Hands should be washed thoroughly before and after carrying out first aid procedures involving external bleeding and/or broken skin. Where possible, disposable gloves should be used when carrying out first aid. Major wounds should be seen by a G.P. or in an emergency the young person should be taken to hospital for attention.
- Never share toothbrushes, flannels or towels, and make sure that personal items such as these are stored hygienically.
- Cuts or wounds which break the skin should be washed with soap and water and covered with waterproof sticking plaster or dressing.

- If blood or bodily fluids are splashed onto the skin, eyes or mouth they should be washed off immediately with water, and/or soap.
- Disposable items, which may have been soiled with bodily fluids, may be flushed down the toilet or burnt.
- Non-disposable items which have been soiled with blood or bodily fluids e.g. terry nappies, clothing, sheets, towels, should be washed in the washing machine at 80 degrees centigrade or boiled before hand washing.

Eating Problems

Children and young people have very different eating habits and preferences. Some children will have big appetites whilst others may be reluctant to eat much at all, both of these can be common at the start of a placement when the child may be feeling scared and insecure.

As the placement progresses you will get to know the child/young person more and you will support the child in eating a healthy balanced diet. However, you need to be aware that some eating problems are serious and can have a damaging effect on physical and emotional health. The most common of these eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Compulsive Eating Disorder.

If you have any concern about the eating habits of a child/young person you should discuss these with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker who will both advise you on any action to take which may be inclusive of a CAMHS consultation.

Anorexia Nervosa

People who suffer from Anorexia Nervosa have an extreme fear of normal body weight and feel fat, even when they have lost so much weight it is obvious to others. They may starve themselves by only eating tiny quantities of food. Some angrily resist attempts to get them to eat or will pretend to have eaten when they have not.

Bulimia

This tends to affect slightly older people although adolescents do suffer from it. People with Bulimia gorge themselves with food, binge, and then make themselves sick to get rid of the food. They also may take large doses of laxatives. They may not look overweight or underweight, which may make their eating problem difficult to detect.

Compulsive Eating Disorder

People who eat compulsively consume much more food than their bodies need, or use food to comfort or distract them. They may become overweight which can lead to serious medical issues for the future.

Eating problems may show during adolescence and should be taken seriously. As well as having an adverse effect on a young person's physical health, eating disorders are often a sign of significant emotional problems.

Eating disorders tends to affect girls more than boys, but it is important to remember that boys do suffer from them too. It is not always easy for foster carers to spot the signs of

eating disorders but if you have any concerns about the eating habits of a child in your care then you should contact your supervising social worker- the child's social worker or the health professional involved with the child to discuss the matter, ensure the child's social worker is informed of the concern and any proposed treatment.

Fire safety

All foster carers must have a fire safety plan which is known to all members of the household. The plan should detail how the family will exit the house in the event of a fire. The plan should be displayed where everyone in the household can see it.

In order to ensure that there is an early warning, you must have at least one smoke alarm on each floor of the house and they should be regularly tested. You should also have a carbon monoxide detector fitted in your home.

On rare occasions, children in care have been known to start fires deliberately or by accident. Your supervising social worker will need to inform the Legal department (Insurance Section) of any placement which poses a fire risk. You should ensure that your fire safety plan is regularly reviewed and reinforced, especially when a child joins your fostering household. The local Fire Brigade can visit you to offer advice if necessary.

Firearms

If you keep firearms, you must hold a valid firearms certificate and must comply with the Firearms Rules 1998, in particular, the requirement that they are securely stored so as to prevent access by any unauthorised person, including a child. Your supervising social worker will wish to discuss this with you as part of the fostering review.

Smoking

Research has highlighted the dangers of passive smoking. The dangers apply not only if someone is in the same room as the smoker, but even if they smoke elsewhere, as the smoke adheres to clothing. Children are more sensitive to the effects of second-hand smoke because their lungs and airways are smaller. It makes them more prone to asthma, respiratory tract and ear infections. Additionally, children living in smoking households are more likely to smoke themselves when they are older.

If you smoke you cannot care for:

- Children with disabilities
- children under five
- children with certain health problems, for example asthma or other respiratory conditions
- children who come from non-smoking households
- older children who have asked not to be placed in smoking households.

When foster carers give up smoking, there will be a period of 12 months before a child under five is placed with them.

If you do smoke you should undertake to follow the guidance from the National Safety

Council on reducing children's exposure to smoke by:

- not smoking around the child, or allowing anyone else to do so
- not allowing anyone to smoke anywhere in the house or car.

Clothing

Part of your allowance is designated for clothing. Children should always be dressed well and in good quality clothing, suitable to their current activity. Where they are of a sufficient age, our children should be involved in choosing clothing, but you should balance this with appropriate guidance. All of this can assist the children's wellbeing and self-esteem.

When children first come into your care they may arrive without appropriate clothing. Your supervising social worker (or social worker) will discuss with you what clothes the child needs and arrange for you to be reimbursed for the cost of purchase (subject to an upper limit), though do remember to provide the receipts.

When the child leaves a placement, they should take with them sufficient clothing all of which should be in good condition and of the right size. In order to avoid potential complaint, it is advisable to write a list of the clothing the child takes with them back to their home or to another placement.

Dinner Money

School dinner money or the cost of a packed lunch should be paid from the foster care allowance for the Looked After Child. Looked After Children and young people placed in foster care are not eligible for free school meals.

Please check with the child's social worker whether the child is receiving free school meals when placed with you. You as the foster care must inform the school that the child is no longer eligible as he/she is in your care.

Disclosure and Barring Service – DBS check

The Disclosure and Barring Service check is undertaken to discover if a person has an existing criminal record in the UK. DBS checks can include 'soft information' where no criminal charges have been brought, but where serious concerns have been raised

The Agency must undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service checks on all foster carers prior to approval and then subsequently every three years. DBS checks are undertaken on all household members 18 years and over.

Although rare, it is important to note that should an allegation against a foster carer be proven or remain a significant concern the Local Agency have a responsibility to inform the DBS and they will decide if this warrants the concern to be added to the harm list within DBS. This would mean that in an enhanced disclosure this information would be visible.

Disruption of Placement

Unfortunately, even in the most experienced foster care placements there can be circumstances which prevent the placement from working and being in the best interests of the Looked After Child or young person. This can lead to a placement breakdown.

Disruption is the word used to describe a placement which ends in an unplanned way or ends outside of the timeframe agreed.

A disruption may occur when the Childrens Social work team form the view that the placement with you is no longer meeting the Looked After Child's needs, or you decide that you are no longer able to care for the child. The Looked After Child may also 'vote with their feet' and decide to leave the placement.

Whenever possible when it is recognised that a placement may be coming to an end, a plan should be developed to either look at saving the placement (through an additional support plan) or look at moving the child on in a planned and amicable way.

Foster carers are expected to avoid ending placements abruptly or in an unplanned manner. This means you need to discuss any concerns you have about a placement with your supervising social worker and maintain good communication with them about your thoughts and any difficulties that arise in placement. Do not allow situations to escalate without seeking professional advice and support.

It is important that foster carers work with the Children's Social Work Team to move a child on to another placement when this decision has been made. Finding another appropriate placement can take a number of weeks and it is always good practice to ensure a period of introduction is arranged for the Looked After Child to meet the new foster carer and foster family to increase the chances of the new placement being successful.

When placements are disrupted there can be strong feelings about how or why things went wrong. This can be an extremely difficult and upsetting time for all concerned and it can be a frightening time for the Looked After Child. It is important to remain professional and objective to enable lessons to be learned by all involved.

It is generally not acceptable for a foster carer to demand a child is removed immediately from the placement and in times of difficulty it is a good idea to take some time-out to consider the positive experiences for the carer and the Looked After Child and try with all concerned to work through the difficulties. A child would only be moved in such a situation if there were exceptional circumstances.

Education

It has been documented that the educational attainment of Looked After Children is well below children who are not Looked After. Some of the significant disadvantage is a result of changes in placement and often changes in school. This lack of consistency is a major factor impacting on poor educational attainment and can have an impact later and into later adult life.

Foster carers have much to do in advocating for the Looked After Children in their family. As a foster carer you will have a vital role to play acting as part of a committed team around the child. Carers should be involved and consulted in all aspects of a child's education and should appeal against decisions that are felt not be in the best interests of the child.

Attending school is an important part of everyday life and can provide a point of stability for Looked After Children who have had their lives disrupted and live apart from their families. It is vital where possible, for the child to remain in their existing school where they have an established network of friends and support. Foster carers will be required to transport the child to and from school and any difficulties should be highlighted at the Placement Planning and Care Planning Meetings.

It is not acceptable for a Looked After Child to be out of education. They should receive priority action by all involved to support their education.

The Carers Role in Education

Carers play an essential role in supporting children in care with their education. It is crucial that a Looked After Child's educational arrangements are prioritized and discussed with the child's social worker and the fostering officer prior to placement.

Carers should highlight any difficulties the Looked After Child in their care may be experiencing at school or with their education. It is important that the carer maintain good links with the school and the child's social worker in regard to the child's education.

Carers should be responsible for:

- Recognising the educational strengths and limitations in regard to each Looked After Child.
- Keeping school informed of changes and emerging problems
- Helping the child to express their concerns or aspirations and advocating on their behalf
- Encouraging the Looked After child to develop their talents and recognize their achievements no matter how small
- Responding quickly to requests from school for discussions or meetings

Carers should ensure attendance at school by:

- establishing clear expectations of attendance, punctuality, uniform and completion of homework.
- Ensure that attendance is promoted and supported. If necessary, the child should be taken to school by the foster carer
- Promote and encourage friendships at school

Carers should provide an appropriate learning environment with:

- A quiet area to do homework
- Time for homework
- Books, pens, paper and other resources
- Learning opportunities outside the home e.g. visits to libraries, museums, parks
- Understanding of the child's ethnicity and background and consider these when making plans.

Carers should take a positive interest in the Looked After Child's education by:

- Attending parent's evenings
- Supporting school policies on discipline and dress
- Taking an interest in the daily activities of school
- Completing homework diaries etc.
- Supporting homework by reading with the Looked After Child, offering advice and making sure the child completes set work
- Supporting school events
- Rewarding achievement, no matter how small

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

You will hear PEPs mentioned a lot. PEP's should ensure that every Looked After Child receives access and support to services, they contribute to stability; minimize disruption and broken schooling; signal particular and special needs; establish clear goals and state who is responsible for achieving them, and act as a record of progress and achievement.

The child's social worker is responsible for initiating the PEP but it is very much a joint plan with the designated teacher, foster carer, Looked After young person and any other person involved in supporting their education. Once initiated these should be held termly.

It is required that foster carers attend PEP meetings as this will ensure that there is understanding of the any issues and regular communication between home and school. Carers should be given copies of completed PEPs.

Exclusions

If a child is excluded from school for a fixed period it is the duty of the school to inform the carer immediately and put in writing the reasons for the exclusion and the number of days the exclusion is for.

Whilst the Looked After Child is excluded the school must:

- Provide appropriate work for them to do at home Put in place measures to try and support the child to avoid future exclusions
- Provide carers with the name of a contact person should they wish to discuss or appeal the exclusion.
- Be clear about the length of the exclusion and the date and time the Looked After Child should return to school/education.

If the exclusion is permanent the school must:

- Inform the carers in writing within one day clearly stating the date the exclusion took place.
- Give details of previous warnings or fixed term exclusions
- Provide carers with the name and number of the Local Education Authority Advisor on the exclusion process.

Valuing and supporting the education of a child in care is one of the most important contributions a carer can make because it is about investing and caring about the child's future and recognising that education is their passport to better chances in life. Education support to Looked After Young People is provided by the Virtual School.

Understanding Behaviour

Importance of Attachment Theory for foster carers

Attachment theory can guide our understanding of the effects of early abuse, neglect, separation and loss on the child's ability to form attachments to new foster carers. The way that children relate to their foster carers can be heavily influenced by the way they learned to relate to their birth parent(s).

Foster carers may find themselves caught up in interactions with their foster child that are not their own. Understanding this process can help a foster carer resist responding to the child in the way they are anticipating. Instead they can gently lead or guide the child into different ways of relating and the child will then be able to experience a more secure attachment relationship.

What is the impact on a child's development and behavior of having attachment difficulties?

Research shows that problems in attachment can lead to a range of difficulties

Brain development

- Children who do not have an attachment to a primary carer early in life tend to experience cognitive delays.
- Children learn how to learn through a series of interchanges with the primary carer. For example, a child learns that discomfort associated with hunger is relieved by eating.
- If an infant is in a state of high arousal such as when their needs are not being met all of their energy goes into coping with increased body tension and little is available for processing the environment and hence learning.
- If a child is exposed to trauma (abuse, Domestic Violence etc.) they become hypervigilant and are stuck in the fight/flight/freeze response. This response stops other parts of the brain working properly preventing some kinds of learning.
- Unsurprisingly - When children feel safe near their parents their brains work better.

Attachment

Many children are unable to communicate their needs other than via their behavior. Attachment is the term used for the emotional bond between the child and the adult/s who are caring for them. Attachment behaviour starts from birth, when the new-born develops a means of engaging their caregiver in order to survive.

Ideally children have secure attachments with their caregivers where the carer is in tune with their needs and able to meet them consistently. However, children placed with foster carers are more likely to have formed insecure attachments with their birth parent or carer as a result of the reasons (such as neglect or abuse) which have led to them being in care.

You need to understand attachment because it will help you understand children's behaviour and how to deal with it. By helping children form an attachment with you, you can also help children develop the ability to make attachments with other carers in the future.

Common delays seen in children with attachment problems include:

- auditory processing (may struggle to understand what you are saying rather than not listening), language development
 - expressing self verbally (struggle to express their views, needs etc.),
 - gross motor problems,
 - fine motor adaptive skills,
 - personal-social development (lacking social skills etc.)
 - inconsistent level of skills (some skills may be over learnt e.g. memory for people, places, numbers etc. whereas there may be many other gaps).

Children without a secure attachment can have difficulty trusting others and may exhibit behaviours aimed at keeping people at an emotional distance.

Secure attachment

In positive attachment relationships, children have available and supportive caregivers who anticipate and respond to their needs. In infancy if a child is hungry, they will be fed, if their nappy requires changing it will be changed, if they are upset, they will be comforted.

This provides children with the security of knowing that their needs will be met and gives them the confidence to explore their environment and to spend time away from their carer, knowing they can return. In this way, they learn to trust and to become self-reliant; this in turn develops their ability to learn and increases their self-esteem. Children who have experienced secure attachments are more resilient when faced with life's stresses or challenges.

Insecure attachment

Where care is neglectful or abusive, children's needs are not met or are only met some of the time. This provokes feelings of anxiety and instead of feeling trusting and confident, children's emotions are focused on surviving, as opposed to learning and exploring. Children may see themselves as unloved and unlovable and believe that they do not deserve good things. They may view adults as unreliable people, who do not protect children from harm.

Even very young children learn to develop behaviours which help them survive. They may shut down emotionally and become very self-reliant; alternatively, they may be constantly demanding of attention; or they may try to be in control by crying incessantly, having temper tantrums or being defiant. For children who have not experienced security and trust, building mutually satisfying relationships is difficult and children may have problems in making and sustaining friendships as they have not learnt how to understand another person's feelings. For them, relationships tend to be about what they can get out of them, rather than what they can give. Their inability to trust can mean that they are unable to discriminate and will greet strangers as great friends, while their fear of closeness can lead them to respond to their carer with anger and defiance. Many foster carers will have experienced placements where children appear to settle in immediately without missing their previous foster carers, but whose behaviour begins to become more problematic after a period of time.

In the most serious cases where children have been constantly terrified because of continuing abuse or constant violence, they may cut off from the world (dissociation) or become hyper-alert, even while asleep. They may develop behaviours such as head-banging or constant masturbating and as they become older other self-harming or aggressive behaviours may emerge such as wrist-cutting, deliberately courting danger, suicide attempts, self-neglect and poor hygiene, cruelty to animals and other children and eating disorders.

Even when they have been mistreated, children are often very loyal to their parent. They can be very protective of a parent who has mental health problems, misuses drugs or alcohol or who is suffering domestic violence. This leaves them with very confused feelings of anger, fear and concern.

Children will bring such behaviours and confused emotions into your home. Although it will take time, given consistency and love, many children can be helped to trust adults and develop attachments. Some children, however, will need therapeutic help in addition to this. See the section on Therapeutic Re-parenting.

Resilience

Resilience can be described as 'a set of qualities that enables people to withstand the impact of adversity'; for children looked after, it is 'normal development under difficult conditions'.

Resilience can offer a child a 'cushion' against difficult life experiences and help them to thrive in spite of difficulties. Some children are naturally resilient, but for others, the quality can be developed if they receive the right kind of support from professionals and you, as their foster carer. Protecting children against adversity may not always be possible, but increasing their resilience is one way of helping them to overcome setbacks and improve their life chances.

Because of their high level of need stemming from pre-care experiences, children looked after particularly need support to develop their resilience, so that they can overcome their negative early experiences and improve outcomes in their future lives.

Resilience is developed through:

- a sense of belonging
- good self-esteem
- a sense of self efficiency

Promoting resilience in children looked after

Resilience in children looked after can be built by ensuring stability so that the child can develop positive, nurturing relationships, feel in control of their lives and allow them think about their future in a positive way. This is done through:

- supportive relationships with at least one adult, normally their foster carer
- supportive relationships with family, especially siblings and grandparents
- a committed adult other than a parent who takes a strong interest in the child and who can act as a mentor or role model
- the capacity to develop and reflect on their life experiences
- talents and outside interests and hobbies
- positive experiences of school

- positive friendships
- the capacity to think ahead and plan for their lives.

School is particularly important as this is where children develop socially and emotionally and where they develop important relationships with both peers and adults. Achievement and attainment at school, both academic and in other activities, helps to build confidence and self-esteem, and enables children to learn new skills.

Involvement in an activity that a child has a particular skill, talent or interest in has been shown to have a significant impact in raising resilience. Taking part in activities can enhance the child's sense of attainment and provide a positive experience and support from peers.

Contact with important figures in the child's life so that they are able to remain connected to their past and make sense of their experiences is important for building their resilience. This is especially important with siblings and friends, as these relationships often provide the most emotional support. Life story work can also help them make sense of their pre-care life.

You are a crucial part of promoting resilience. Foster placements need to offer the stability of a secure base that provides the child with an opportunity to develop good relationships and attachments. Apart from their parents, a child looked after's relationship with their foster carer is likely to be the most important relationship with an adult, and it is the quality of care received by the child in placement that provides the most opportunity for building and promoting resilience.

Corporate Parenting Board

When a child becomes looked after the Sefton Council has "corporate responsibilities for parental tasks". This is known as "corporate parenting". The collative responsibility of the Council and its partners to prioritize the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

The Corporate Parenting Board meet regularly and is attended by councillor's children and young people who are looked after, foster carers, adoptive carers, health representatives and managers of the Directorate for Children and Young People.

The Board:

- Works to secure high aspirations and stable relationships for all children looked after.
- Works to ensure the voice of children looked after are heard on both policy and the services they receive.
- Oversees and monitors the performance indicators for health well-being and education of looked after children.

- Considers the outcomes of regulatory visits and inspection reports on provision of children looked after.
- Celebrates the achievements of children looked after and their careers.

Medication in Foster Care

Foster carers have a role in ensuring that medication, recording, storage, handling, administration and its disposal, is managed in a responsible way. Records are checked by the supervising social worker to ensure that they are accurate.

Delegated Consent – Medical and Dental Treatment

To ensure that cared for children and young people get the medical and dental treatment that they need. As a Foster Carer, you must ensure that your foster child is registered with a General Practitioner and a Dentist. They will either keep their own if their home address is local to you, or you should register them with your own doctor and dentist. You must also ensure that the child has regular dental checks, and regular sight and hearing tests.

Other Important Information

Foster carers have a role in ensuring that children and young people stay healthy. Further information to support you in this role is set out briefly below. More information is available from your supervising social worker.

Accidents and Sudden Illnesses

Accidents and sudden illnesses can happen, so if a child/young person in your care requires emergency treatment, you should make the necessary arrangements to take them to the GP or local Accident and Emergency Department and contact the child's social worker.

Consent to medical treatment is required, so always have the relevant medical consent form readily available, although if the treatment is urgent the attending doctors will generally treat the child first and then deal with the issue of consent afterwards. Young people aged sixteen years or over give their own consent to medical treatment and some under sixteen may also be able to give or refuse consent if they are considered by the medical staff to have sufficient understanding.

Where a serious operation or use of general anaesthetic is required medical staff will usually require consent and sometimes a discussion about risk, with the Service Manager.

If an accident occurs that is more than a minor injury, always tell the child's Social Worker as soon as you can and keep them informed.

If the accident occurs outside of normal office hours, contact the Out of Hours on: 0151 934.5333 The social worker or Out of Hours worker will inform the child's parents if you have not already done so and may arrange for them to attend the GP/hospital as well if it is appropriate.

Accidents and illnesses must be recorded, no matter how small. It is important that you inform your supervising social worker/child's social worker as soon as possible after the event and complete a specific incident form. You must record on your Significant Incidents

Form details of the accident, noting how it occurred and what action you have taken. It can sometimes be difficult to remember or explain the signs of an injury weeks later, so do this as soon as you can.

Alcohol

Foster carers should be mindful of how their attitudes towards alcohol may impact on children and young people in their care. Some children and young people have come from homes where alcohol has been a negative feature in their lives and therefore may be fearful when they see carers drinking. It is acknowledged that, as with many other families, foster families may have alcohol in their homes and drink in accordance with safe limits.

However, the welfare and safety of children and young people in their care must be the paramount consideration. Carers must ensure that there is at least one carer at all times who can take full responsibility for children in placement. Foster carers should not encourage children/young people to drink or purchase alcohol under the legal age limit. Where carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking alcohol, they should advise the social worker.

Extending 30 hours to Children in Foster Care

All 3 & 4-year-old children are entitled to claim a free 15 hours childcare place for 30 weeks of the year. Working carers can apply to double this offer to 30 hours if they are both working.

The Government has recently opened up this additional early year funding offer to 3 and 4-year-old children who are officially fostered. This means that you could now claim additional childcare support if you are in paid employment outside of your fostering responsibilities. The welfare of children is at the heart of this entitlement so any additional childcare would only be offered with the approval of the child's social worker as being consistent with the child's care plan.

Peer Mentors

The agency has a pool of experienced and skilled foster carers who are available to provide peer mentoring to less experienced foster carers. They have received training and supervision in order to help them perform their duties adequately. The mentoring takes the form of guiding, supporting and empowering their peers in order to resolve issues and overcome difficulties associated with fostering.

Foster carers understand that one foster carer can empathise with another and make connections with their own fostering experience in a different way to that which a social worker might.

Peer mentors provide one-to-one support to foster carers, particularly to those who are embarking on their fostering career, but also to those who whilst may have been approved for longer are encountering a new difficulty not yet experienced in their career.

There is an expectation that if a mentor has any safeguarding concerns about a foster family, fostered child or young person or the child or young person's birth family they are obliged to pass on these concerns to the mentee's SSW or fostering manger.

The Fostering Panel

Sefton's Fostering Panel includes people with a wide range of experience and interests. The Panel is constituted according to the Fostering Services Regulations. There is an Independent Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson; both people are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their role. The Panel has representatives from health, education, a person who was once looked after and a foster carer from another fostering agency. There is also a Panel Adviser from the fostering service.

The Panel considers new approval applications for short- term long term foster carers, family and friend's (connected persons) foster carers and the annual review of existing foster carers. Once approved by Sefton, foster carers can only work for this authority. We encourage and support applicants and existing foster carers to attend the Panel to which their report is presented.

The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker for Sefton. All decisions are notified to the applicants in writing. If applicants disagree with the decision, they can follow the Representations/ Complaints procedure.

If a foster carer decides to resign, a brief report will be made to the Fostering Panel and their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Sefton's Register of Foster Carers. If the Panel considers that a foster carer is no longer suitable, the Panel can recommend to the Agency Decision maker that they are de-registered. The Fostering Panel produces quality assured minutes to the Agency Decision Maker. Panel has a quality assurance function in which it may consider practice issues which informs service development.

Chief Executive of Sefton M.B.C
Dwayne Johnson

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Head of Children's Social Care
Laura Knights

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