



Policy on Changes in Fostering Households and Carer's Relationships

Annual declaration of changes in the fostering household

As part of the annual foster carer's review (AFCR), all approved Foster Carers and identified support carers will be asked to complete and sign a declaration form, which gives details of any change of circumstances that may have taken place during the last 12 months (see Appendix 1). However, there is an expectation that any changes are discussed by carers with their Placement Manager as and when they occur. If Foster Carers have not shared essential information, for example, not informing their PM that someone has joined the household on a temporary or permanent basis, a decision may be made to carry out a standard of care enquiry or review the carer's suitability to be approved. A carer's Safer Caring Policy will also need to be reviewed following any significant change of circumstances.

Assessment of new partners

The Local Authority delegates the care of vulnerable children to AFA, who have a responsibility in partnership with Foster Carers, to keep them safe from harm. Research shows that Looked after Children (LAC) can be targeted by those who wish to exploit them, often making contact through social media or 'recruitment' by peers to groom young people and encourage them to become involved in gangs or the distribution of drugs. There may also be a risk to those caring for children, either their own and/or LAC, who use social media to initiate casual or permanent relationships. Using the Internet to meet a partner can lead to a long-term meaningful relationship, but for some people it is a way to make contact with children. Carers must contact their Placement Manager (PM) before allowing a new partner to meet any children living in a fostering household. Foster Carers need to be aware that information regarding a change of circumstance will be shared with the Local Authority responsible for any children in placement. Placement Managers should follow the process in Appendix 2 when considering what steps to take.

If the relationship progresses and the carer plans to introduce their new partner to children in the fostering household, the PM must arrange to meet with the carer and partner to outline the agency and Foster Carer's responsibility to safeguard children, and the expectation that they will co-operate fully with any requests for information. There should also be a discussion regarding safer caring and the agency's policy on behaviour management. Although there is an expectation that the arrival of a new partner will change the dynamics of a household, they should not be involved in the day to day care of children until a Form F assessment has been carried out and presented to the Fostering Panel.

At the initial meeting with the carer and their partner, the Placement Manager will draw up a statement outlining the expectations of the agency and the consequences should these conditions be breached. If a carer and/or their partner refuse to sign the statement, or do not respect the conditions, the Placement Manager must contact the Area Manager to discuss any safeguarding concerns.

As a minimum requirement a Disclosure and Barring Check must be carried out prior to a partner having any contact with children in the home, even if they are supervised by the carer. There can be no overnight stays until an initial assessment has been carried out and a decision has been made as to whether or not a partner is suitable to live in a fostering household. At the point in the relationship where a Foster Carer is telling the Placement Manager that they want their partner to stay overnight an initial assessment must be started. The carer's Safer Caring Policy must be updated to reflect the changes in the household and a Risk Assessment carried out.

The initial assessment of a partner will include checks, which will include contact with any Local Authorities in whose area the partner has lived; 2 personal references and contact with any previous partners who have the care of children, both related and unrelated to the applicant. In addition, contact will be made with any adult children who have been parented by the prospective partner. The views of children living in the carer's household should also be sought. (see Appendix 3 for further details).

If a new partner moves in with a carer, they must complete a Form F report and Skills to Foster course. All assessments must be presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation before being forwarded to the Decision Maker. Should the Decision Maker decide not to continue the carer's approval or approve the carer's partner, they can appeal through the AFA appeals procedure or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). A letter will be sent to the carer and their partner telling them how they can appeal. A decision not to approve will have significant implications for the Foster Carer/s and a meeting will be held with the Local Authority of each child in placement in order to consider whether or not they should remain in the placement and if there are any safeguarding issues regarding the carer's own children.

Separation of approved Foster Carers

Should carers who are jointly approved separate, regardless of whether they leave the fostering household or not, an assessment will be carried out to consider their suitability to continue fostering as single carers. The Placement Manager will initially discuss the carer's plans for the future; covering areas such as accommodation and financial arrangements and the anticipated role of both carers in the lives of any LAC in placement. The PM will want to be reassured that any changes will not jeopardise the safety or wellbeing of any children in placement. Information will be shared with the placing social worker who, following consultation with their line manager and a meeting with agency representatives, will make a decision about the placement continuing.

Bearing in mind the importance of placement stability for children, the agency will provide additional support and training as required to enable any newly separated carers to maintain the placement, should this be the wish of the placing Local Authority. The person nominated as the main carer will be assessed using the BAAF Form F. A decision will be made by the agency as to the most appropriate assessment for the partner who is no longer a main carer, based on the frequency of their continued involvement with any LAC in placement. If it is felt that their role will be peripheral, whether or not they continue to have contact with any LAC, a decision may be made to terminate their approval.

Connected Policies or guidance

Name of policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Policy on the Expectations of Foster Carer's Behaviour	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers, Placement Managers

Updated May 2019

Appendix 1

**ANGLIA FOSTERING AGENCY
ANNUAL PERSONAL DECLARATION FOR FOSTER CARERS**

Name of carer/s:

Name of Placement Manager

During the last 12 months:

Please tick relevant box		Yes	No
1	Have you or any member of your household been questioned and/or cautioned by the police or convicted of any offence?		
2	Have you had a child removed from your care?		
3	Has a Child Arrangements Order been made in respect of any child in your care?		
4	Have you applied or been approved to act as a childminder or private Foster Carer?		
5	Have you been prohibited from acting as a childminder or private Foster Carer or from working with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity?		
6	Have you, or any place where you work, been involved in a Social Care, Police or any other investigation relating to children or vulnerable adults?		
7	Has there been any significant change of circumstances for a respite carer or anyone living in your home; family members not living in your home; anyone who regularly visits your home or has frequent contact with any child placed in your care by a LA?		
8	Has anyone joined or left your household and if so, what is/was their relationship to you?		
9	Have you or any member of your family (living in or out of the household) experienced, or been diagnosed as suffering from any serious physical or mental ill health?		
10	Have you moved address and/or changed your contact number or email address?		
11	Have there, in the last 12 months, been any other change of circumstance, for you or your family members, not covered by the above list?		

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above, please add details on the back of this form. The declaration must be signed by both carers (if approved) and returned to your Placement Manager.

I/We have answered all of the questions above honestly and truthfully. I/We understand that withholding information or making a false declaration may result in termination of my/our approval as Foster Carers.

Signature/s:

Date:

Appendix 2 Expectation of Foster Carers when starting a relationship

Stage 1: No contact with LAC inside or outside of the fostering household

Carer to inform PM of relationship

PM advises carer of assessment process should the relationship progress

PM checks that carer has advised new partner of fostering status

Stage 2: New partner has contact with LAC inside and outside of the fostering household but does not stay overnight

Carer must inform PM and must supervise children at all times, not leaving any children alone with new partner Within 1 month the PM must:

Meet with the new partner to discuss the initial assessment and collect evidence for a DBS check

Submit a DBS check – any issues to be discussed and presented to the Area Manager

Inform the social worker of any LAC in placement, advise that the children's views are sought regarding the new partner now and on a regular basis, along with contact with children's schools

Stage 3: New partner stays overnight when LAC are in placement, likelihood of unsupervised contact

Carer must inform PM prior to new partner staying overnight, a satisfactory DBS check must have been received and any concerns discussed with the Area Manager. No overnight stays can take place until the initial assessment has been completed.

Within 1 month the PM must:

Meet with the carer and new partner, who must give an agreement to tell the PM if overnight stays are taking place regularly.

Carry out a LA check for all areas where the new partner has lived

Take up 2 written and phone references from the partner's employer, ex-partner and family/friends

The new partner must sign a confidentiality agreement and be given information on allegations, safer caring and behaviour management procedures as well as the expectations of the agency in respect of their involvement with any child in placement

Update the Safer Caring Policy and carry out a Risk Assessment

Stage 4: New partner moves in with Foster Carer

The new partner must not move in unless an initial assessment (stage 3) has been completed

PM must upgrade initial assessment to Form F, carrying out additional interviews as necessary, with report presented to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation as to the new partner's suitability to foster (and the current approved carer's continued suitability)

Form F should be completed and presented to Panel within 3 months of the new partner moving in

Medical and other statutory checks must be completed, including personal references

Partner must attend a Skills to Foster course

Appendix 3 - Initial assessment – areas to be covered with the new partner:

1. Background

- History of relationship with carer, including how they met
- History of previous relationships and details of any birth or non-related children the new partner has cared for/lived with
- Contact with children other than in the fostering household (inc. adult children), current relationship and level of commitment
- Relationship with children in the placement, carer's own and LAC
- Will any member of the new partner's immediate or extended family have contact with the children in the placement, what are the family's views regarding the new relationship and the partner joining a fostering household – do any of the partner's family pose a risk

2. Personal history

- Experience of being parented and impact on own parenting including any current or past history/experience of domestic violence
- Past and present employment/voluntary work
- Accommodation – history of moves and current arrangements (e.g. will the carer move to the partner's house or will he/she be selling their property)
- Educational achievements
- Lifestyle and interests
- Any health issues (physical or mental) including use of alcohol, prescribed and non-prescribed drugs
- Significant life events – chronology and family tree to be completed

3. Empathy with LAC

- Understanding of the impact of child's past experience on their development and behaviour
- Attitude towards the child's parents
- Ability to safeguard and understanding of safer caring
- Attitude regarding behaviour management and strategies employed
- Experience of and response to stress

4. Working in partnership

- Understanding of the Foster Carer's role
- Expectations of their own role within the fostering household
- Willingness to attend supervision with PM and carer
- Previous experience and quality of contact with statutory agencies
- Commitment to attend preparation course
- Has complied with all requests from the agency/LA including possibility of moving out of the carer's home while assessment completed

5. Analysis and conclusion

- Is the partner able to keep a child safe or do they pose a risk to children
- What is their attitude to/understanding of the fostering task and their role
- Strengths and vulnerabilities of the new partner
- Assessment of risk and what, if anything, can be done to minimise risks
- Ability to meet child's needs
- Views of the child's social worker having observed child with the new partner
- Views of the child

6. Recommendation