



Regular Childcare Arrangements and Overnight Stays with Support Carers

Principles

The purpose of this policy is to enhance the experience of children in care and make it as 'normal' as possible.

This policy does not apply if a carer and foster child stay at the same time with members of the main carer's family, but rather where the child stays somewhere without the carer. The majority of overnight stays will be carried out using a support carer who will be a relative or close friend, well known to both the main carer and the child to whom the overnight arrangement relates.

Overnight stays with a Foster Carer's friends or relatives are more appropriate for children in long term placements, rather than those in short term or emergency care. However, such requests will be considered on a case by case basis in discussion with the child's Social Worker. For long term placements, decision making should take into account the arrangements for the Foster Carer's own children, if of a comparable age.

The principle of overnight stays should be discussed in placement planning meetings and LAC reviews and potential safeguarding issues must be fully considered. Foster Carers must ensure that anyone who is caring for the child, whether overnight or for a shorter period, has the contact details of the Placement Manager and the child's social worker in case of emergency.

Before agreeing to an overnight stay with a support carer who is not known to the Agency, the following should be requested:

- Name of the adult who will be responsible for the child
- Contact details for the adult caring for the child
- How the child can contact the carer
- Arrangements for returning the child
- Sleeping arrangements, particularly if the child is sharing a bedroom

Relevant information should be provided to allow the support carer to care for the child or young person appropriately. This information must be shared on a 'need to know' basis only. This may include:

- Any specific health care needs of the child, including problems with bed wetting.
- Any established routines carried out prior to bedtime.
- Any behaviour management issues which, if the adult is unaware of them, could lead to difficulties during the visit. For example, if the child is over-familiar with adults or unduly assertive with younger children.

Foster Carers must keep the needs of the child foremost when proposing arrangements for an overnight stay with support carers. During the Placement Planning meeting there should be a discussion as to whether a Foster Carer should have delegated responsibility for arranging overnight stays. Even if this is the case it is essential for the main carers to inform the child's Social Worker and the Placement Manager of any arrangements.

Assessment of support carers

The expectation is that during the approval process of carers, their relationship with wider family members or close friends will be discussed and potential support carers will be identified and put forward for assessment.

Support carers should be key people in the carers support network. They should have regular contact with the fostering family and have an established relationship with the children in placement. Support carers will need to undergo the following assessment:

- Suitability, experience of caring for children, insight and understanding of the needs of LAC
- DBS and medical checks, personal references and sessions with the main carer's Placement Manager, or other allocated worker, to discuss safer caring and AFAs behavior management policy
- Health and safety check (if they are caring for the child in their own home)
- Sharing and discussing the main carer's safer caring policy
- During the Form F assessment any views regarding the proposed support carers (as given by referees for the applicants) should be recorded and incorporated into the report.

Considering support carers for longer stayovers - actions to be completed

- Discussion in review/planning forums in advance of the stayover taking place
- The child's parents should be consulted/advised by the child's Social Worker of the proposed arrangement where required
- The child's Social Worker must be in agreement
- The child must be in agreement with the plan (taking into account their age and understanding)
- Contact arrangements with parents and other relatives must not be disrupted (unless there is good reason and advance discussion)
- Discussion with the support carer relating to safer caring, the needs of the child, arrangements and routines that need to be supported
- The timescale for stayovers would normally be no more than three nights. Longer stays are not excluded, but would need careful consideration and discussion. Relevant issues would be the child's age, the pattern of past contact with the support carer, whether the main carer's own children are also going to be staying with the support carer and how the child's needs will be adequately met outside of the main carer's home.

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Expectations of Foster Carers Behaviour	Carers, Placement Managers and Senior staff
Guidance on the Assessment of Support Carers	Placement Managers, AFA Managers,
Foster Carers Handbook	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Support Carer Handbook	Support Carers, Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Placements with Foster Carers	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Safeguarding	Foster Carers, Support Carers and all staff
Behaviour Management Policy	Support Carers, Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers	Support carers, Foster Carers, all staff

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