



Pet Ownership Policy

Policy Statement on Pet Ownership for Foster Carers

AFA Fostering gives paramount consideration to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children throughout their childhood and, as part of this, we value the role of pets living in fostering families.

The Agency recognises the rewards that come from caring for animals. There are many positive effects, which include the opportunity to teach children how to care and share with others. It may also provide a 'therapeutic' outlet for the child and pet, both enjoying the reassurance and comfort of developing a relationship with a trusted and trusting companion.

Potentially Dangerous Pets

However, it is recognised that some pets, particularly dogs, can pose a risk. Therefore, AFA will not consider anyone as a prospective Foster Carer if they own a pet listed as dangerous in legislation; nor will AFA continue to approve a Foster Carer who becomes the owner of such a pet post-approval.

We will not consider applications from potential Foster Carers who own a breed of dog that is not registered, or required to be registered, under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991/1997. These breeds are:

- Pit Bull Terriers
- Japanese Towsers
- Dogo Argentines
- Fila Brazilleros

All Foster Carers must complete a detailed Behavioural Assessment of each dog living in their household who is older than 6 months. This assessment will be reviewed with the applicant or Foster Carer to assess any health and safety issues within their home. The conclusion of the assessment is reviewed annually. For puppies under 6 months we will complete a dog questionnaire in the interim. Caution will be taken when assessing households containing Alsatian/German Shepherd, Rottweiler, Doberman, or Bulldogs (pure or cross breeds) or if there are two or more dogs of any breed in the home. Where there is a risk, guidance will be sought from the RSPCA and/or the family's vet.

Applications will not be considered from anyone owning a pet that has to be registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Numbers of Dogs/Pets and Size of Foster Home

There is no restriction on the maximum number of dogs or pets in a home, but having more than two dogs requires careful assessment because:

- Of the likelihood for a pack instinct to develop
- Having 2 or more dogs require a great deal of time and attention if they are to be well looked after

It is a recognised fact that dogs can attack a child. The real risk is not related to the breed of dog but the size in the context also of its temperament and training. Small dogs may attack, but it is a large dog that has the strength to seriously maim or kill. Therefore, when assessing a family as potential carers we will take this into consideration when making a final recommendation to the Fostering Panel. The details recorded in the behavioural assessment report will ensure all areas information is thoroughly considered.

The Fostering Panel must consider any dogs or pets in the household when considering approval, as well as the age of the youngest child to be placed.

It would be helpful if a prospective/approved carer can evidence that their dog has undertaken dog training/obedience classes.

Working Dogs and Animals in Rural Communities

If prospective carers have working dogs (e.g. Police dogs/farm dogs/sheep dogs or hunting dogs etc) they should be in an area in the home or grounds where children cannot gain access and where any contact is supervised at all times. If the animal needs to be kept away from children, the assessing Social Worker will ask to see the area where they are kept and will need to satisfy themselves that children cannot gain access. If concerns are identified, a report or letter from the family's vet, detailing the type of work undertaken by the animal would need to be included in the assessment presented to Panel.

Animals/Dogs kept for Breeding

This will be assessed on a case by case basis. However, the assessing Social Worker will need to satisfy themselves that children cannot gain access during the breeding process. This is to protect both the child and the animal.

Assessment

When assessing a family to become Foster Carers it is important to have a discussion about any pets currently in the household. It is the responsibility of the prospective carer to prove the temperament of a dog or other pets in the household. Prospective carers must also consider how to introduce foster children to dogs, or other pets (where applicable).

In all cases, the Pet Questionnaire and/or Dog Behavioural Assessment and Questionnaire will be completed and will form part of the final assessment. The completed questionnaires will be kept on the applicant's file, along with the Foster Carer's assessment report. The questionnaires will need to be reviewed each time a new pet is introduced or leaves the household, and as part of the Annual Foster Carer Review.

Careful consideration will be given as to the suitability of applicants who have unusual or exotic animals as pets, for example, reptiles such as snakes. Such creatures may be venomous or bite, and they also pose a risk of infection, with many reptiles carrying the salmonella organism in their waste and on their skin. Equal care should be taken of caged birds, particularly large species such as parrots.

Health, Safety and Hygiene

Dogs and cats should be wormed and treated regularly for fleas. All vaccinations should be up-to-date. Carers should be able to evidence this with a certificate or letter from their vet when requested.

All outside areas should be kept clean of fouling. Pets in cages must be kept clean and gloves should be worn when emptying cages and cat litter trays.

New Pets

If following approval as carers the family decide to get a dog or other pet, they must consider the following:

- What sort of dog/pet would fit in with their approval status
- Do they have background information on the dog/pet e.g. age, history etc.

All carers should consult with their Placement Manager when this information is known. Further advice can be given to carers/applicants by AFA if required.

Visiting Animals

It is important to note that if Foster Carers have friends/relatives with pets who visit their home, this Policy will apply.

Action should a Pet Injure a Child

If a pet in the household bites, scratches or injures a child the carer must take the following action immediately:

- Remove and secure the animal away from the child/ren
- Give the child first aid and seek medical attention as soon as possible
- Notify the Placement Manager/child's Social Worker
- Complete an incident recording, giving details of the incident and injuries incurred. This will also need to be recorded as a Schedule 6 event by the Foster Carer (see separate guidance on recording)

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Safeguarding Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Placement Managers Guidance	Placement Managers, Senior Managers
Expectations of Foster Carers Behaviour	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Foster Carers Reviews Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Foster Carers Recording Guidance	Foster Carers, Placement Managers

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