



Behaviour Management

Encouraging and rewarding children

Whilst children and young people bring their own values, beliefs and behaviours to a placement, Foster Carers play a key role in influencing those in their care. The culture and attitude in a fostering home, as created by the carers, is crucial. Foster Carers are expected to understand, manage and respond to children's behaviour, encouraging them to take responsibility for their actions, helping them to learn how to resolve conflict. A culture which is restrictive, unsupportive, discouraging and punitive is likely to result in instability, hostility and potential disruption of the placement.

All foster placements need to have clear, fair and consistent boundaries to enable those in their care to feel safe, valued and appropriately rewarded. If children and young people are living in a safe and optimistic environment, they thrive and do well. It makes sense therefore that Foster Carers who adopt this approach will also experience greater stability and less disruptions.

Foster Carers should at all times endeavour to:

- Listen to and empathise with children and young people, respect their thoughts and feelings and take their wishes into consideration
- Look for things that are going well, a willingness to try something new or a step in the right direction needs to be acknowledged and rewarded.

Rewards

Rewards should be used in a creative way, specific to individual needs, capabilities and interests. It is important for carers to 'step into a child's shoes' and think about what will be seen as praise and encouragement by them. Helping a child or young person understand the reason why they are being praised is important, as is helping them to accept praise, something which they many find difficult.

Children and young people can be rewarded with toys, games, activities or money, but all 'tangible' rewards should be accompanied by the use of 'non tangible' encouragement and support. This means carers who demonstrate to children and young people that they have done well. 'Non tangible' rewards include verbal praise, smiling, 'high fives', touching e.g. placing a hand gently on a child's head, or giving a hug if the child is happy for you to do so. These can all be reinforced by talking to other people within earshot about the child or young person's achievements and progress.

Early on in a placement, rewards given may appear to outweigh good behaviour. However, those we care for have often experienced criticism and rejection, and it may take time for them to accept praise. As time goes on, the expectations of the child or young person are incrementally increased. Having gained greater self-esteem, the likelihood of succeeding increases and, with a gradual increase in confidence and resilience, they are more likely to try new challenges and can also cope better when they don't always succeed, or things don't work out.

For example:

- Those who have few social or life skills and whose self-esteem and confidence is low, may require forms of encouragement and reward which are intensive, frequent or even excessive. This can help remind them that they are worthy, doing well and are appreciated
- A child or young person who has previously been unable to get up for school may be offered a present or activity for getting up on time for a set number of days. Over time, as they achieve what is expected, such rewards should be reduced, or there should be an expectation of achieving more for the same or similar reward.

However, it should also be borne in mind that some cannot tolerate praise as it undermines the low perception they have of themselves. For these children and young people smaller, more specific rewards are needed.

Minimum house rules

All carers should have household rules, setting out their expectations of how things are managed in the home. This should be explained to those looked after, along with the reasons for the rules which they should also know apply to everyone. They should not feel they are being treated differently or with less regard than other members of the household. Ideally children and young people should know the expectations of the household before they are placed, but side from planned placements, this is rarely possible. Carers need to be patient and prepared to repeat the house rules frequently, bearing in mind that many children and young people will have come from chaotic backgrounds where there are few if any rules.

House rules may include the following:

- No smoking
- Keep the bedroom clean and tidy
- Not going into anyone else's bedroom unless you have knocked and/or been invited in
- Being appropriately dressed at all times
- If you go out, return home at the time you and your carer have agreed; always be where you say you will be; if you want to change your plans when you are out, ask your carer first
- Be kind to others in your foster family, this includes their pets
- Homework must be done before play
- If you have been excluded from school, school work must be done at home
- When you use the bathroom or toilet always close the door
- If you have any problems talk to your carer or someone you feel you can trust
- Think about other people's feelings.

Sanctions

Sanctions can be very effective but, before imposing them, think carefully. Often those who are 'looked after' have come to view themselves, and are often viewed, as failures. They will have experienced very little other than negativity and unfair and inconsistent sanctions. Before imposing sanctions, carers should do all they can to support and encourage children and young people to do well. If they do not behave acceptably, strategies should be adopted that are encouraging and sympathetic to their past experiences. Behaviour is a form of communication and shows how a child or young person may be feeling. Understanding the reasons for this behaviour can help you think how best to avoid a similar situation in the future.

As far as is possible carers should try and ignore negative behaviour. This can be challenging, but rather than noticing and sanctioning misbehaviour it is always better to watch out for, and reward, good behaviour or any step in the right direction. For example, it may be more effective to allow a child to have use of a video or TV at bedtime for getting up on time, rather than taking the TV away for getting up late. In this example, the former is discouraging and could cause resentment, but the latter is encouraging and could improve self-esteem and the relationship with the carers. Building a sense of trust is vital, so allowing the child or young person to know you are there to listen, encourage and negotiate is essential when looking for a way forward. Be creative, think outside the box.

If unacceptable behaviour continues, children and young people should be reminded of what is expected being given further encouragement to get it right. If misbehaviour persists or is serious, effective use of reprimands can act as a disincentive or firm reminder. If this does not work sanctions may be effective but must be reasonable and the minimum necessary to achieve the objective. Carers need to be optimistic, believing that the sanction will have the desired outcome and eventually establish acceptable behaviour. If sanctions are imposed, carers should follow the following principles:

- Sanctions must be the exception, not the rule, they should be a last resort
- Sanctions must not be imposed as an act of revenge or retaliation
- Think before imposing a sanction; don't apply a sanction in the heat of the moment
- Sanctions may only be imposed on children for persistent or serious misbehaviour; where reminders and reprimands have failed or are likely to fail
- Sanctions should only be used if there is a reasonable chance they will have the desired effect, preventing further unacceptable behaviour
- Before applying any sanction, make sure the child is aware that his/her behaviour is unacceptable and, if possible, warn him/her that sanctions will be applied if the unacceptable behaviour continues
- It is the certainty not the severity of sanctions that is important
- Sanctions should only last as long as they need to, allowing the child the opportunity to make a fresh start as quickly as possible.

Sanctions that should not be used

- Any form of corporal punishment; i.e. any intentional application of force as punishment, including slapping, punching, rough handling and throwing missile
- Any sanction relating to the consumption or deprivation of food or drink
- Any restrictions on a child's contact with his or her parents, relatives or friends; visits to the child by his or her parents, relatives or friends; a child's communication with any of the persons listed below*; or his/her access to any telephone helpline providing counselling or advice for children. This does not prevent contact or communication being restricted in exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary to do so to protect the child or others; although this sanction should not be imposed without discussion with the child's Social Worker.

A child or young person should not be prevented from contacting:

- Any Social Worker assigned to them by their Placing Authority
- Any Officer of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service appointed to the child
- Any person appointed in respect of any requirement of the procedure specified in the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 1991
- Any independent visitor; and
- Any person authorised by the Regulatory Authority.

Foster carers must not:

- Make a child wear distinctive or inappropriate clothes
- Use or withhold of medication or medical or dental treatment
- Intentionally deprive the child or young person of sleep
- Restrict or prevent a child from using the toilet
- Allocate a task that is beyond the physical ability or capacity of the child
- Seek to modify a child's behaviour through bribery or the use of threats
- Impose a sanction which may humiliate a child or cause them to be ridiculed
- Impose any fine or financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum by way of reparation. (The Court may impose fines upon a child which carers should encourage and support them to repay)
- Undertake any intimate physical examination of a child
- Withhold aids/equipment needed by a disabled child
- Impose any sanction which involves a child acting against another child; or the sanction of a group of children for the behaviour of an individual child; and
- Swear at the child or use foul, demeaning or humiliating language towards them.

Approved Sanctions

The following sanctions may be imposed upon children:

- Confiscation or withdrawal of a telephone or mobile phone in order to protect a child or another person from harm, injury or to protect property from being damaged
- Restriction on sending or receiving letters or other correspondence (including the use of electronic or internet correspondence) in order to protect a child or another person from harm, injury or to protect property from being damaged
- Reparation, involving the child doing something to put right the wrong they have done, e.g. repairing damage or returning stolen property
- Restitution, involving the child paying for all or part of damage caused, or the replacement of misappropriated monies or goods. No more than two thirds of a child's pocket money may be taken in these circumstances if the payment is small and withdrawn in a single weekly amount. Larger amounts may be paid in restitution but must be of a fixed amount with a clear start and end period. If the damage is serious or the size of payment particularly large, then the child's Social Worker should be informed of the matter
- Curtailment of leisure activities, involving a child being prevented from participating in activities
- Involving a child in undertaking additional chores
- Early bedtimes, by up to half an hour or as agreed with the child's Social Worker
- Removal of equipment, for example the use of a TV or video/DVD player/device
- Loss of privileges, for example the withdrawal of the privilege to stay up late.

Recording of Sanctions

If a child receives a sanction it must be recorded in the carer's log and discussed with the Placement Manager at the next supervision. If a child has been sanctioned it is important that they are then allowed to move on and not be constantly reminded of any misbehaviour. It is important that carers 'let it lie' and don't keep reminding people, family members or others of what has taken place.

Searching

Carers are not permitted to conduct body searches, pat down searches, searches of clothing being worn by the child or searching their bedrooms. Should carers suspect that a child is carrying or has concealed an item which may place the child or another person at risk, they should try to obtain the item by co-operation and negotiation, notify the Agency and, in an emergency, the Police.

Serious incidents and use of physical intervention, including violence towards a Foster Carer

In the event of any serious incident (e.g. accident, violence or assault, damage to property), carers should take what action they deem necessary to protect children and themselves from immediate harm or injury. They should then notify the Agency immediately afterwards and this is particularly important in situations where the child or young person is acting aggressively or violently towards a Foster Carer. It can be helpful in such circumstances, if there are other children in the home, to have everyone leave the room in order to give a child who is very distressed and/or angry space to calm down. It may be that sitting just outside the room and letting the child know you are there if they want to talk provides reassurance.

However, if a child attacks another child or a carer, and various strategies haven't worked, then consideration has to be given to contacting the Police. The child must know that physical assaults are unacceptable, but equally, carers must be aware that many children looked after will have personally experienced violence or have witnessed domestic violence. This doesn't make the behaviour acceptable, but that they may have normalised such behaviour because of their past experiences is something to actively consider when trying to deal with aggression.

When the situation has calmed, support the child to talk about the episode, ask them what you could have done to help them regain control. Many children will say they 'don't know', and although this can be a frustrating response, it is usually a truthful one. There are many ways that memories of abuse can be triggered. It could be a smell, a noise, an adult standing over them, or someone shouting and threatening them; all things that spark a major emotional and physical response. In these cases, carers can help children and young people recognise their feelings of losing control, providing a safe place within the carer's sight where they can sit until they feel ready to talk. Sometimes physical activity, such as running around the garden or ripping paper can help a child to express their anger in an acceptable way.

Even if there is a risk of serious injury/harm or damage to property, carers should not use any form of physical intervention except as a last resort to prevent themselves or others from being injured or to prevent serious damage to property. If any form of physical intervention is used, it must be the least intrusive necessary to protect the child, carer(s) or others and last for the shortest possible period of time. At no time should carers act unless they are confident of managing the situation safely, without escalation or risking further injury.

The Agency will endeavour to manage the challenges that arise from caring for children and young people without recourse to the Police, who should only be involved in serious circumstances such as:

- An emergency necessitating their immediate involvement to protect the child or others
- Following a discussion with the Placement Manager/On Call Manager.

If any serious incident occurs or the Police are called, the Registered Manager/On Call Manager must be notified without delay. They will notify the relevant Social Worker(s) and arrange for a full report to be made of the incident and any actions taken. The Registered Manager will monitor all such events and may need to make a notification to the Regulatory Authority.

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Expectations of Foster Carer's Behaviour	Foster Carers, Placement Managers and Senior staff
Foster Carer's Handbook	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Management of Allegations Against Staff and Carers	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Notification of Significant Events	Placement Managers and Senior Managers

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