



Care Arrangements with Foster Parents

Initial Referral Process

AFA will only accept referrals for children from Local Authorities. Where a referral is made, the referring Local Authority will be asked to provide the following information:

- The reason for the request
- Information about the child's needs
- Risk assessments in respect of the child and their family
- A description of the child's wishes and feelings
- The care plan for the child and relevant timescales

In the case of an emergency where the referring Local Authority does not provide the above information at the time of the referral, they will be asked to provide as much information as is available and, if the arrangement goes ahead, they will be asked to provide full information within 5 working days of the child's move, or at the point of the Care Arrangement Planning Meeting (aka Placement Planning Meeting), whichever is soonest. Any information that is not provided within the stated timescales should be re-requested, and if still not received, the request will be escalated within AFA. The reason for this response is to ensure all paperwork has been received, and that the child's needs are understood and are being met. It is important for the Foster Parent and for AFA to have all available information about the child and their family as this could hinder the Foster Parent in providing a safe environment for the child and others in the household.

Matching

AFA is fully committed to offering carefully matched and planned homes for children. Qualified and experienced Fostering Social Workers are mindful of the matching process throughout all stages of their work, which includes recruitment, assessment, approval, considering vacancies, planning moves and offering support. AFA Duty staff, in consultation with Fostering Social Workers and in discussion with Local Authority Social Work staff will co-ordinate the matching process. When considering matching, Fostering Social Workers take account of both Regulation 17.3 of the Fostering Services Regulations and Standard 15 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

Matching Considerations

To ensure that a child or children are carefully and appropriately matched with a Foster Parent, AFA will initially consider what Foster Parents are able to offer, and the child who is the most appropriate match. This is covered in the vacancy information document shared with the Duty Team at the point that Foster Parents are identified as having a vacancy.

At the point of matching, AFA will take into account a range of factors including (but not limited to):

- The child's care plan and recent assessments of the child and their family
- Whether the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and language needs match, as far as is possible, with the Foster Parent. Where full matching is not possible, consideration as to what extra support may be available

- Foster Parent's specific support needs, to address for any gaps identified during matching, including any specific training needs
- The dynamics between all children in the household, and where appropriate these have been fully discussed with allocated social workers
- The possibility of keeping siblings living together, unless the care plan and referral information clearly states otherwise
- The Foster Parent's view of the information given to them about the child
- Whether there is the possibility for introductions before the child moves, so that both the child and Foster Parent can express a view about the proposed arrangement. Where this is not possible, the views of those concerned should be considered following information being shared with them

Recording Matching Considerations and Decisions

Details of the matching process, including the names and views of those consulted must be recorded on the child's file using the CHARMS system. There are various stages that should be recorded within this, including the matching process, discussion of the referral and sharing of documents with the Foster Parent and discussions with Fostering Social Workers allocated to them, or Senior Management in their absence. All information will be collated as part of the matching proforma. Please see duty process and recording policy for more information.

In addition, discussions that have been had with any potential Foster Parent should be recorded on their electronic file, to indicate that they have been considered as part of the matching process, and to clarify what information they were provided.

Process for Child moves

Once a decision has been made, a pre-move planning meeting should take place between the Foster Parent, the Fostering Social Worker and the Responsible Local Authority. If appropriate, the child and their family/significant others should attend. This meeting must consider and agree the detailed arrangements for the child. Where it is not possible to hold a planning meeting before the child moves, for example where the move happens in an emergency, a care arrangement planning meeting must take place within 5 working days of the move. In some circumstances, this meeting may need to be completed virtually to ensure compliance with the timescale, however, face to face meetings should take place where possible.

Details of the requirements of the Care Arrangement Plan (aka Placement Plan) are set out in Schedule 2 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and in Chapter 2 of the Children Act 1989.

The main purpose of the Care Arrangement Planning Meeting is to share all the available information about the child with the Foster Parent and agree the contents of the agreement/plan, which will include confirmation of the following:

- Registration of the child with local health professionals (GP, Dentist & Optician) and arrangements for the child's health care (including the administration of medication).
- Signed medical consent from the Local Authority and parents if required
- Plans for the child's schooling and their educational needs.
- Any specific cultural, religious or dietary needs of the child
- Any behaviour management issues
- Regularity of visits from the Local Authority Social Worker. These should take place within one week of the child's move and thereafter at least every six weeks, and three monthly after the first year.

- Details of arrangements for time with family members and/or significant others
- Any plans for introduction prior to the child's move

An important aspect of the planning meeting is consideration of delegation of authority. Please see the separate policy for further information.

As well as providing the agreement/plan, the child's Social Worker should also be asked to provide as much information about the child as possible, for example a chronology of significant events in their life, a copy of their care plan and health care plan and any other relevant information such as, recent review reports, pathway plan, personal education plan, education, health and care plan, reports from specialists or therapists.

Preparation and Introductions

It is AFA's aim to make moving a positive experience for each child/young person. Whilst appreciating it is an apprehensive and stressful time, AFA will endeavour to minimise the effects for each child and help them to settle into their new home as effortlessly as possible.

Once the child's home has been identified, wherever possible, visits should be made by the Social Worker to the Foster Parents home and there should be a period of introductions between them and the child. This should involve the child receiving information about the foster home, including a profile of the Foster Parents and members of their household. A meeting between the child and the Foster Parents, preferably at the foster home, is an opportunity for an initial introduction during which the child can become familiar with the house and household. This would ideally include an overnight stay.

Throughout the introduction process, Foster Parents will discuss issues with the child regarding routines within the home, information about bedtimes, meals, visitors, pocket money, school, privacy and the overall expectations regarding behaviour in the home. Equally, the child is encouraged to discuss their views as to what expectations they have of the Foster Parents, to try to resolve any uncertainties/concerns at the outset and to reinforce transparency and honesty to the child.

If introductory visits are not possible, arrangements may be made for the Foster Parent to visit the child and parents or their current Foster Parents, or as a minimum, for information about them, including their profile, to be sent to the child. If none of these arrangements can be made, for example where the child is being moved in an emergency or at short notice, extra care must be taken to support the child. The information described above should be provided to them as soon as possible after the move.

Children coming into the foster home will receive an AFA Welcome Box which will include some items to help a child settle. It will also include a copy of an age-appropriate AFA Children's Guide which gives details of organisations who can offer support and information as well as information about AFA's complaints procedure.

Children's Reviews and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

Children's reviews, sometimes called 'Statutory Reviews' or 'Looked After Children Reviews', are convened and conducted by the Local Authority. The Foster Parents and the Fostering Social Worker will provide information and, if appropriate to do so under the Local Authority's procedures, attending the meetings. Reviews are formal meetings, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The purpose of the review is to:

- Ensure that appropriate plans are in place to safeguard and promote the overall welfare of the child in the most effective way, and achieve permanence for them within a timescale that meets their needs
- To monitor the progress of plans and ensure they are being progressed effectively
- To make decisions, as necessary, for amendments to those plans to reflect any change in information and/or circumstances

The review should also take account of the child's care arrangement agreement/plan and any other plans or strategies (e.g. behaviour management strategy), ensuring they are up to date or that arrangements are in place to update them.

Reviews should be convened at the following intervals:

- The initial review should be conducted within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after
- The second review should be conducted within three months of the initial review
- Subsequent reviews should be conducted no more than six months after any previous review.

A review should also be convened:

- As soon as practicable where a child is moved from one home to another on an unplanned basis or a significant change in the circumstances of a child suggests their home is no longer appropriate
- At the request of the IRO
- If a significant change to the child's care plan is proposed
- Where, as a result of a social work visit, the assessment is that the child's welfare is not being adequately safeguarded and promoted
- Where the Local Authority is proposing to no longer provide accommodation for the child

If Reviews are not arranged or conducted as set out above, the Fostering Social Worker will initially raise concerns with the child's Social Worker. If matters are not resolved, they will contact the IRO.

Preparation for the Review

When arrangements are made to conduct a review, the Fostering Social Worker should collaborate with the Foster Parent to compile a progress report in time for the child's social worker to circulate such before the review date (please see separate guidance on how to complete these reports). The Foster Parent should also collate relevant information, including dates of health and other appointments, as well as any key information relating to the child or young person since the last review.

Children should be encouraged and supported to complete a review questionnaire or prepare their own report/letter for the review. If it appears to be necessary or the child requests it, an appointed advocate such as an Independent Visitor should be asked to accompany the child to the Review meeting.

At the review meeting, the child's risk assessment should be discussed and updated as appropriate. This will allow for contributions from other professionals, to ensure the updated risk assessment is completed with all the information available. For children aged 10 and over, a child sexual exploitation toolkit will also be completed or updated. Any amendment to a risk assessment or toolkit will be documented on AFA's forms and placed on the child's electronic record with copies being sent to the Local Authority Social Worker and to anyone else whom it has been agreed should have access. Any changes in the perceived risk can then be considered with the Foster Parent and the child's individual safer caring policy will be updated.

Endings and Moves Within the Agency

Arrangements will not be ended by the Agency for reasons other than:

- The end of the arrangement is within the child's care plan, care arrangement plan or pathway plan
- To protect the child
- To protect other members of the household
- In an emergency where other more suitable arrangements to maintain the arrangement/home cannot be made.

If the Local Authority is proposing to end the arrangement for reasons other than those stated above, AFA will inform the child's IRO.

Whenever a move is being considered the wishes and feelings of the child must be obtained and considered. Where their wishes and feelings are not being observed, the reasons for this must be explained. Children should not move until they have had a chance to express their views and the reason/s for the move are explained so that they can understand.

If a move to another carer within the Agency is being considered, this will be treated as a move to a new home.

If a young person is approaching 18 and there is a view that the arrangement should continue, this will be explored further and, if it is in the child's interests, it may be possible for the arrangement to continue post 18 under Staying Put arrangements.

Foster Parents will be encouraged wherever possible to keep in contact with children and young people who have moved on.

Disruption Meetings or End of Arrangement Processes

When an arrangement ends prematurely, a disruption meeting will normally be convened to review the child's case history. This is a decision to be made by the Local Authority, but AFA's processes mean that they will request that a disruption meeting is held when the Local Authority does not arrange one. Ideally a disruption meeting should take place as soon as practicable and within 28 days of the ending, subject to liaison with the Local Authority.

The purpose of a disruption meeting is to examine various elements of the situation to understand the sequence of events leading to the disruption and learn lessons from what has occurred. This will:

- Help the child by understanding their needs better
- Improve practice by understanding what went wrong
- Recognise all the positive work and good experiences for the child, amongst all the difficulties
- Support everyone involved and help them carry on and recover
- Demonstrate that disruption is never the fault of one or two people or the result of a single factor; it is invariably the outcome of a whole series of connected factors

Regardless of whether a disruption meeting takes place, AFA will undertake its own internal process by completing an Ending Report to review the situation with the same objectives as a disruption meeting. This is a crucial stage to look at the matching process, by considering the assessment of the child's needs and presentation at the time of seeking a home for them, and to see how accurately these were understood, the assessment of what the Foster Parents could offer and the support they were given in understanding and providing for the child's needs. The

meeting will also look at the child's introduction to the home and any other relevant issues that were raised while they lived with the family.

Where appropriate, the Ending Report will be shared with the responsible Local Authority as is relevant to the consideration of matching for other children and young people.

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Delegated Authority Policy	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Expectations of Foster Parents' Behaviour	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers and Senior staff
Foster Parents Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Education Policy	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Supervision, Support and Training Policy	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Preparing for Independence and Staying Put Policy	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Fostering Social Workers guidance	Fostering Social Workers and Senior staff

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