



## **Supervision, Support and Training of Foster Parents**

All approved Foster Parents will have a suitably qualified, allocated Fostering Social Worker who is responsible for supervising and supporting them, ensuring they have the necessary guidance, support and direction to provide a quality service. This will include an understanding of the requirement to work within the legislation relating to fostering, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering as well as AFA's policies, procedures and practice guidance.

It is the Social Worker for the child or children in the foster home who holds responsibility for giving specific advice or support relating to the child, in line with their Care Plan and Care Arrangement (Placement) Agreement/Plan. The Fostering Social Worker will work alongside the Child's Social Worker to assist them in ensuring that the child's needs are well understood, and that appropriate support and guidance is in place for the Foster Parents to meet the child's needs. There is an overriding responsibility on all members of the team around the children to ensure that children are safe and well.

The Fostering Social Worker must also ensure that the Foster Parents' training and development needs are identified and met. For newly approved Foster Parents this includes completing the Training, Support and Development Standards with their first year of registration. They also have the responsibility to ensure Foster Parents are familiar and made aware of new policies and guidance.

### **Planned Supervision Visits**

The frequency of supervision visits should be agreed between the Foster Parent and the Fostering Social Worker and endorsed by the relevant Line/Team/Registered Manager at the time of approval. The rate that these will be held will be flexible to the changing needs of Foster Parents and those they care for but should be a minimum of monthly (see below). A Supervision Agreement will be completed by the Fostering Social Worker with each Foster Parent, for them and AFA to clarify expectations and roles.

Supervision is a supportive two-way process to:

- Enable Foster Parents to contribute effectively to the plans for the children for whom they are caring,
- Provide appropriate monitoring and feedback on the Foster Parents' work to ensure National Minimum and Fostering Regulations are met and followed,
- Complete Personal Development Plans with each Foster Parent, which are linked to their training and annual review,
- Support Foster Parents by providing advice or guidance, as appropriate,
- Assist Foster Parents to reflect on and learn from their experience, helping them to consider how best to approach the care of children they look after,
- Give Foster Parents an opportunity to raise any concerns and make sure they are addressed appropriately,

- Acknowledge the challenges and demands that the fostering task makes on foster families and ensure appropriate support is available,
- Recognise and address any difficulties in relation to fostering that the Foster Parents' own children may be experiencing,
- Support Foster Parents to work in an anti-discriminatory way that respects and promotes individual differences.

Foster Parents are encouraged to provide updating information prior to supervision meetings regarding how things are for them and their family, information/updates on children in their care including positive areas of progress as well as any areas of concern they may have, and any other items they wish to add to the agenda. The agenda for each supervision meeting should cover:

- A review of actions from the last supervision meeting or from any un-announced visit completed since the last supervision,
- Personal issues, including the impact of a child in the home on the Foster Parent and their own family,
- Monitoring and checks that are required of the foster home and relating to children,
- Child/ren in foster care, their progress as well as any areas of concern; their health, cultural, educational, leisure, support needs and any delegated authority issues arising,
- Safer caring, health and safety, any risks or CSE issues arising relating to those children, considering how risks are being or can be reduced
- A reflective discussion, including guidance or advice, working to a trauma informed and therapeutic approach,
- Evidence of Foster Parent learning, including discussion regarding training/development issues.
- Agreed actions or outcomes.

Whenever possible, visits should be completed face-to-face. However, there may be some circumstances where a virtual visit is necessary. These should only take place following discussion with or direction from AFA Management.

Supervision visits should be recorded on a progress note entitled "Foster Parent Supervision Record" on Charms. Such should be shared with them via this Database with the Fostering Social Workers emailing the Foster Parent following supervision to confirm the actions that have been agreed. Foster Parents should be asked to digitally sign the supervision record on Charms. These records will inform their Annual Review (see Review of Foster Parents policy).

## **Frequency of Supervision and Other Contact**

Supervision meetings will take place at least once every month with additional visits as agreed between the Fostering Social Worker and the Foster Parent. In addition there will be weekly contact, which can be held more frequently if needed. This may take place via telephone calls, text messages, email etc. A Foster Parent should be supported to give their view as to what type of regular contact they would prefer. The ongoing level of contact will alter for each Foster Parent at different times and will be in place as required for all those working to support them and the child.

Foster Parents will also have contact with their Fostering Social Worker at other times, for example, in meetings relating to the children in their care. There may also have contact with other Agency staff in between supervision visits. Fostering Social Workers will help advocate for children and their Foster Parents, to assist in gaining necessary support, to challenge practice issues and when services or Care Planning requirements are not met.

## **Unannounced Visits**

There should be at least one unannounced visit a year, as per the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and AFA aims to complete two visits a year to each Foster Parent. In some circumstances, these may need to be completed virtually. However, as there are clear limitations to virtual visits, these should be used only in exceptional circumstances, and following the direction of AFA's management. The main purpose of the unannounced visit will be to look at the home environment. One unannounced visit will be undertaken by the Foster Parents' Fostering Social Worker and the second will sometimes be carried out by another member of staff (on a rota basis) who will need to check:

- Who is in the home,
- The environment in and outside the home, including Health and Safety issues
- Who is looking after the child,
- If the Foster Parent is not at home, what arrangements have been made for the care of the child.

If the Foster Parents are not at home, but the child is present and being looked after by someone else, the Fostering Social Worker should check the identity of that person and not continue with the visit. The exception to this will be if the person is a Support Carer, assessed by AFA.

Unannounced visits should be recorded, using the relevant template on Charms. There are different expectations for the visit for non-allocated workers, for instance, they are not expected to see the child alone unless it is felt appropriate, given an existing relationship.

There should not be a regular programme of unannounced visits without there being a specific reason, for example if a Foster Parent is being closely monitored and in such an event, the reason should be explained to them, and clear documentation of the monitoring being completed recorded on charms.

## **Support Provided by the Fostering Social Worker and other AFA Staff**

Fostering Social Workers should ensure they offer responsive support to Foster Parents, which ensures that the needs of children in their care are being met. They assist in the matching of potential children as well as supporting children already in the home. The Fostering Social Worker must ensure appropriate supervision takes place as detailed. It is important that they are sensitive and supportive while objective, feeling able to challenge a Foster Parent if required.

Support is also available for all Foster Parents in the absence of their Fostering Social Worker, either from the Registered Manager, other Managers or Fostering Social Workers. AFA's out of hours' service also allows Foster Parents to have direct contact with a qualified worker at any time of the day or night and is supported by a Manager at all times. Foster Parents will be provided with information about the support available from the Agency outside of office hours, including the contact details of Senior Managers.

The Fostering Social Worker will support and assist the Foster Parent in liaising and working with other professionals including the team around the child. They should maintain good contact with the Social Worker and other key professionals for any child placed, ensuring that the needs of the child remain paramount at all times. They should also engage in any professionals or other meetings relating to the child or Foster Parent, as appropriate. They should challenge other professionals where needed, to ensure support and intervention is forthcoming, in the best interests of the children and as per their Care Plan.

It is the Fostering Social Worker's role to ensure that the Foster Parent is meeting all of the Agency's expectations as outlined in the Foster Parent Handbook and Foster Parent Agreement. This means that the Fostering Social Worker must ensure that Foster Parents are undertaking all of their professional responsibilities alongside providing a high standard of care to the children living with them.

It is also the Fostering Social Worker's role to ensure that appropriate checks and reviews are carried out in a comprehensive and timely fashion.

The Fostering Social Worker also has ongoing contact with any children looked after by the Foster Parents, to ensure their wellbeing. They will meet with the child on a regular basis and see them alone too. Children will be provided with contact details for the Agency as part of their Children's Guide and Welcome Box information.

Further information relating to the responsibilities of Fostering Social Workers can be found in the Fostering Social Workers Guidance.

Support Groups, Forums and Participation Meetings are arranged regularly to allow Foster Parents to access support as and when required. Support Groups also provide Foster Parents with an opportunity to obtain and offer support to and from one another while developing their skills.

## **Role of the Fostering Social Worker if Allegations are made against a Foster Parent**

For detailed guidance, see the Managing Allegations, Complaints and Standards of Care Issues about Foster Parents Policy and relating procedures.

If allegations regarding the care or safeguarding of a child are made, and an investigation is to take place, a Manager/Fostering Social Worker other than those allocated to the Foster Parent will carry out the investigation. However, the Foster Parents' allocated Fostering Social Worker should:

- Continue to support the family on a day-to-day basis,
- Assist the Foster Parent/s by sharing written information about the support available from AFA or independent sources,
- Make the Foster Parent/s aware of the process and their rights during an investigation.

## **Training**

AFA provide a programme of pre-approval training as well as induction training. A number of these courses are also renewable every three years, as they relate to Safeguarding practice. Renewable courses will be provided on an ongoing basis.

A number of other courses are core and so there is an expectation that these are completed within the first four years of approval. These will provide a solid foundation for Foster Parents in their role, including providing an understanding of trauma and therapeutic parenting. AFA will provide training and guidance to support all newly approved Foster Parents to complete the TSD Standards for Foster Care.

There will be an ongoing review of the previous training that has been provided and from this a comprehensive training package will be put in place throughout the year. The Foster Parent's needs, as well as any requests for specific training courses from Foster Parents or staff will be

considered on an ongoing basis and incorporated within the programme. Foster Parents are notified of the training programme on a quarterly and ongoing basis and their personal development will be kept under review to identify training and learning needed to develop their skills and knowledge, as discussed during supervision and in annual reviews. Access for all to a 'Live' Personal Development Plan via Charms allows all to log ongoing training and learning that has been completed and to reflect on this.

The Agency has expectations in terms of the minimum level of training to be attended by Foster Parents both pre and post approval. This is outlined in the training and learning guidance. In brief this means the following training is expected:

Years of approval	Main Foster Parent/ Joint Foster Parents	Second Foster Parents
0 to 4 years	4 courses a year	2 courses a year
Over 4 years	3 courses a year	1 course a year

Foster Parents should be supported by their Fostering Social Worker to access training, both directly from AFA and from other sources, including online, virtual or one-to-one training.

Training needs will also be assessed and considered throughout the year, particularly at the point of a new match is being made, a significant change taking place for any of the children in the home or if an allegation is made (see Fostering Social Workers guidance for more detail).

Access to a range of books, DVDs, websites, podcasts and other resources to support professional development will also be made available to Foster Parents, a list of resources is available on the Policy website.

### **Connected Policies or Guidance**

<b>Name of Policy / Guidance</b>	<b>Relevant for</b>
Expectations of Foster Parents Behaviour	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers and Senior staff
Foster Parents Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Management of Allegations Against Staff and Foster Parents	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Training and Learning Guidance	All staff and Foster Parents
Fostering Social Worker Guidance	Fostering Social Workers, Senior staff

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