



Changes in Fostering Households and Relationships

Annual Declaration of Changes in the Fostering Household

As part of the Annual Foster Parent's Review (AFPR), all approved Foster Parents and identified Support Carers will be asked to complete and sign a declaration form, which gives details as to any change of circumstances that may have taken place during the last 12 months (see Appendix 1). However, there is an expectation that any changes are discussed by Foster Parents with their Fostering Social Workers (FSW) as and when they occur. If Foster Parents have not shared essential information, for example, that someone has joined their household on a temporary or permanent basis, a decision may be made to carry out a Standards of Care enquiry or further AFPR to consider their suitability for approval. A Foster Parent's Safer Caring Policy will also need to be reviewed following any significant change of circumstances.

Assessment of New Partners

The Local Authority delegates the care of vulnerable children to AFA, who have a responsibility in partnership with Foster Parents, to keep them safe from harm. Standard 4.1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services sets out that "Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation)". Research shows that children who are looked after can be targeted by those who wish to exploit them. This can, for example, happen by someone using the internet to meet a partner as a means to make contact with children. Therefore, Foster Parents must contact their FSW before allowing a new partner to meet any children living in their household. Information regarding such a change of circumstance will be shared with the Local Authority responsible for those in their care. FSWs should follow the process in Appendix 2 when considering what steps to take.

If a Foster Parent plans to introduce their new partner to children and young people looked after living in the foster home, the FSW must arrange to meet with them and their new partner. This is to discuss and outline the responsibilities placed on both AFA and the Foster Parent to safeguard children, and the expectation that they and their new partner will co-operate fully with any requests for information. A Disclosure and Barring Check (DBS) must be carried out prior to a new partner having any contact with the child or young person, even if they are supervised by the Foster Parent.

Where a Foster Parent has advised their FSW that they want their partner to stay overnight, an Initial Assessment will be carried out. There can be no overnight stays until this has been completed and a decision made as to whether or not a partner is suitable to stay overnight in a fostering household. Appendix 2 sets out details as to the checks involved within this assessment, which will include:

- contact with any Local Authorities in whose area the partner has lived,
- two personal references,
- contact with any previous partners, including those who have the care of children, both related and unrelated to the applicant, if they were involved with those children

at any point.

- discussion with any adults who had been parented by the prospective partner.
- seeking the views of children living in the Foster Parent's household.

Where a decision is made that they are suitable, safer caring and AFA's policies on Foster Parent behaviour and behaviour management will be discussed with the Foster Parent and their partner. The Foster Parent's Safer Caring Policy and the Risk Assessment for any child or young person living with them will be updated. Although there is an expectation that the arrival of a new partner will change the dynamics of a household, they should not be involved in the day-to-day care of children and young people until a Fostering Assessment Report has been carried out and presented to the Fostering Panel.

At the initial meeting, the FSW will draw up a statement outlining the expectations of the Agency and the consequences should these conditions be breached. If a Foster Parent and/or their partner refuse to sign the statement, or do not respect the conditions, the FSW must discuss this with their Manager.

If a new partner moves in with a Foster Parent, they must attend AFA's Preparing to Foster training course along with the Foster Parent. While the Foster Parent will have already undertaken this training, attending with their new partner is an expectation as it gives an opportunity for AFA to see how the couple present together. A Fostering Assessment will be undertaken. In essence this is a re-assessment of the Foster Parent in the context of their new relationship and will consider their suitability as a couple to foster (see Appendix 3 for further details). The Fostering Assessment Report will be presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation before being forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker. Should a decision be made not to continue the Foster Parent's approval or approve their partner, they can appeal through the AFA appeals procedure or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and a letter will be sent to the Foster Parent and their partner telling them how they can appeal.

Any decision not to approve will have significant implications for the Foster Parent and a meeting will be held with the Local Authority for each child or young person in their care to consider whether or not they should remain in the fostering home during any appeal.

Separation of Approved Foster Parents

Should Foster Parents who are jointly approved separate, regardless of whether they leave the fostering household or not, an assessment will be carried out to consider their suitability to continue fostering as single Foster Parents, if it is their wish to do so. The FSW will initially discuss their plans for the future, covering areas such as accommodation and financial arrangements and the anticipated role of both Foster Parents in the lives of any children looked after. The FSW will need to be reassured that any changes will not jeopardise the safety or wellbeing of any children living with them. Information will be shared with the child's Social Worker who will meet with AFA to consider the suitability of the care arrangement continuing.

Bearing in mind the importance of stability for children, the Agency will provide additional support and training as required to enable any newly separated Foster Parents to maintain the care arrangement, should this be the wish of the placing Local Authority. A Fostering Assessment will be undertaken for the person requesting to remain the Foster Parent for the child(ren) in question to consider their suitability to foster in the future. A decision will be made by the Agency as to the most appropriate assessment for the partner who is no longer caring for the child(ren), based on the anticipated frequency of their continued involvement with any child who is looked after. If this individual also wishes to be considered as a Foster Parent in their own right, their suitability will also need to be considered through the completion of a Fostering Assessment.

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All Staff and Foster Parents
Expectations of Foster Parent's Behaviour	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Policy	All Staff and Foster Parents
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers

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Appendix 1

ANGLIA FOSTERING AGENCY ANNUAL PERSONAL DECLARATION FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Name of Foster Parent/s:

Name of Fostering Social Worker:

During the last 12 months:

Please tick relevant box		Yes	No
1	Have you or any member of your household been questioned and/or cautioned by the Police or convicted of any offence?		
2	Have you had a child removed from your care?		
3	Has a Child Arrangements Order been made in respect of any child in your care?		
4	Have you applied or been approved to act as a childminder or private Foster Parent?		
5	Have you been prohibited from acting as a childminder or private Foster Parent or from working with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity?		
6	Have you, or any place where you work, been involved in a Social Care, Police or any other investigation relating to children or vulnerable adults?		
7	Has there been any significant change of circumstances for a support carer or anyone living in your home; family members not living in your home; anyone who regularly visits your home or has frequent contact with any child placed in your care by a LA?		
8	Has anyone joined or left your household and if so, what is/was their relationship to you?		
9	Have you or any member of your family (living in or out of the household) experienced, or been diagnosed as suffering from any serious physical or mental ill health?		
10	Have you moved address and/or changed your contact number or email address?		
11	Have there, in the last 12 months, been any other change of circumstance, for you or your family members, not covered by the above list?		

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above, please add details on the back of this form. The declaration must be signed by both Foster Parents (if approved) and returned to your Fostering Social Worker.

I/We have answered all of the questions above honestly and truthfully. I/We understand that withholding information or making a false declaration may result in termination of my/our approval as Foster Parents.

Signature/s:

Date:

Appendix 2 Expectation of Foster Parents when starting a relationship

Stage 1: There is no contact with a child looked after inside or outside of the fostering household

Foster Parent to inform FSW of relationship.

FSW shares this policy with the Foster Parent, advises them as to the assessment process should the relationship progress and confirms they have advised their new partner of their fostering status. The FSW discusses with the Foster Parent the expectations around maintaining confidentiality of the child's information.

Stage 2: Plan for the new partner to have contact with child looked after, whether inside or outside of the fostering household but does NOT stay overnight

The Foster Parent must inform their FSW who will arrange to meet them and their new partner to discuss safeguarding responsibilities, safer caring, and behaviour management. The FSW will draw up a statement outlining expectations for the Foster Parent and their new partner to sign.

The need for a DBS will be discussed and information gained for this. A completed DBS check is required before the new partner can have any contact, supervised or not, with the child or young person looked after.

The FSW will discuss any issues arising from this meeting with their Manager.

The FSW will inform the child's Social Worker of the new relationship, requesting that the children's views are sought regarding the new partner now and on a regular basis.

Stage 3: Plan is for the new partner to stay overnight when the child looked after is in the foster home and there is the likelihood of unsupervised contact between them

The Foster Parent must inform the FSW who will undertake an initial assessment to gain an understanding of them and their suitability to stay overnight within a fostering household. The assessment will include the following checks:

- Local Authority checks in whose area the new partner has lived.
- Two personal references.
- Ex-partner checks, including with those who have the care of children, both related and unrelated to the new partner, if the new partner was involved with those children at any point.
- Discussions with any children (as appropriate) and adults who had been parented by the new partner.
- The views of children living in the Foster Parent's household.
- A medical self-declaration (and a full medical report should this be deemed necessary given any conditions which may impact on the child).

The new partner must sign a confidentiality agreement and complete an initial training course on safeguarding and be given information on allegations, safer caring and behaviour management procedures as well as AFA's expectations in respect of their involvement with any child in the foster home.

The FSW will update the Safer Caring Policy and Risk Assessment for each child in the household. They will also update the Foster Parent's Health and Safety check.

Foster Parents are to include within their logs when the new partner is present and relevant information as to observations of the child at these times.

Stage 4: The new partner wishes to move in with the Foster Parent

The new partner must NOT move in to the foster home unless an initial assessment has been completed and signed off.

The FSW will complete a Fostering Assessment Report, within 3 months of the new partner moving into the home, carrying out all other regular assessment checks that have not already been completed. This will be a joint assessment incorporating a re-assessment of the Foster Parent in the context of their new relationship.

The new partner will attend Preparing to Foster Training along with the Foster Parent.

The FSW will present the Fostering Assessment Report to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation as to the new partner's suitability to foster (and the current approved Foster Parent's continued suitability)

The approved Foster Parents will complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within the first year of their joint approval.

Appendix 3 - Full assessment – areas to be covered with the new partner

1. Background

- History of relationship with Foster Parent, including how they met
- History of previous relationships and details of any birth or non-related children the new partner has cared for/lived with
- Contact with children, including any adult children, current relationship and level of commitment
- Relationship with children in the foster home: the Foster Parent's own and any child looked after
- If any member of the new partner's immediate or extended family will have contact with the children, what are their views regarding the new relationship and arrangement, do any of the partner's family pose a risk?

2. Personal History

- Experience of being parented and impact on own parenting including any current or past history/experience of domestic violence
- Past and present employment/voluntary work
- Accommodation – history of moves and current arrangements (e.g. will the Foster Parent move to the partner's house or will he/she be selling their property)
- Educational achievements
- Lifestyle and interests
- Any health issues (physical or mental) including use of alcohol, prescribed and non-prescribed drugs
- Significant life events – chronology and family tree to be completed

3. Empathy with Children looked after

- Understanding of the impact of child's past experience on their development and behaviour
- Attitude towards the child's parents
- Ability to safeguard and an understanding of safer caring
- Attitude regarding behaviour management and strategies employed
- Experience of and response to stress

4. Working in Partnership

- Understanding of the Foster Parent's role
- Expectations of their own role within the fostering household
- Willingness to attend supervision with FSW and Foster Parent
- Previous experience and quality of contact with statutory agencies
- Commitment to attend preparation course
- Has complied with all requests from the Agency/LA including possibility of moving out of the Foster Parent's home while assessment completed

5. Analysis and Conclusion

- Is the partner able to keep a child safe or do they pose a risk to children?
- What is their attitude to/understanding of the fostering task and their role?
- Strengths and vulnerabilities of the new partner
- Assessment of risk and what, if anything, can be done to minimise risks
- Ability to meet child's needs
- Views of the child's social worker having observed child with the new partner
- Views of the child

6. Recommendation