



Safer Recruitment Policy

We consider staff, Foster Parents and independent workers as 'people in positions of trust' and manage safeguarding arrangements as a result, including our Safer Recruitment practices.

As an equal opportunity's employer, AFA undertakes to treat all applicants for positions fairly and equitably. The importance of equality of opportunity for all is recognised, as are the benefits of having a diversity of talent, skills and potential. As such AFA welcomes applications from as wide a range of applicants as possible, including those with criminal records.

Safer Recruitment: Staff

Please note that this policy mainly considers issues relating to safeguarding and the fair recruitment of staff and so should be considered alongside AFA's other staffing policies which are available as part of the Staff Handbook.

Personnel employed by AFA must be suitable to work with children and young people and will be managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for those in foster care. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience will be sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the Agency.

Appointment of Staff

Where a Manager identifies the need to recruit a new staff member, this will be formally considered with the Management Team, taking into account the reason for the post, the structure of the organisation, role required and financial aspects. Once formally agreed, existing staff members will be notified internally via email as to the creation of a new post and be invited to apply as appropriate.

The notification of a new post will be advertised on the company website www.afafostering.com. Advertisements may be placed in professional magazines such as Community Care, local press jobs pages and online job sites for example Indeed, or local newspapers. Recruitment Agencies may be used where appropriate. Recruitment advertisements will specify the nature of the position and the need for proof of professional qualifications, references from a recent previous employer, statutory checks such as DBS checks and regards previous related experience. Advertisements are to comply with The Equality Act 2010 and will have an appropriate closing date for applications.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to the recruitment process to ensure that no applicant is placed at a substantial disadvantage because of their disability, compared with non-disabled applicants. Respondents will be asked to apply for the position by contacting AFA to request an application pack or by downloading a link from the website as appropriate. Once completed this can be returned by post or email. The selection process will commence following the closing date.

Applicants are asked to declare all 'unspent' convictions unless the nature of the position being applied for is exempt as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 2001 and it is a requirement that an entire criminal record (including spent convictions) is declared. This will be made clear in the recruitment literature. Where applicable, Applicants will be given the opportunity at interview to discuss the subject of any declared offences or other matter and their relativity to the position being sought. Failure to reveal information that is relevant to the position sought will lead to the immediate withdrawal of any offer of employment.

All individuals are assured that the presence of a criminal record will not necessarily exclude them from employment with AFA. Any criminal background will be assessed by reference to the circumstances and nature of offences and how these relate to the nature of the position.

Staff who shall work directly with Foster Parents will need to demonstrate they have an appropriate qualification and a good understanding of foster care including:

- Knowledge and understanding of the Children Act and Fostering Regulations and guidance, relevant current policies, such as National Minimum Standards, Working Together and associated Child Protection guidance and the regulatory requirements under the Care Standards Act.
- Knowledge of the growth and development of children and an ability to communicate with children and young people.
- An in-depth knowledge of Child Protection and Safeguarding procedures
- Understanding the importance of a complaint's procedure.
- An ability to promote equality, diversity and the rights of individuals in groups.
- Knowledge of the roles of other agencies, in particular Social Care, Health, the Police, the Courts and Education.

Applicants for posts not directly involved with children, young people and Foster Parents will need to demonstrate knowledge, experience and skills for the relevant position as well as an understanding of Safeguarding and Data Protection.

Shortlisting for interview, where needed, will be completed by the Line Manager for the post and a minimum of one other Manager or HR personnel. Shortlisting is completed using anonymised application forms and using AFA's shortlisting form and the person specification for the position. The shortlisting will be considered solely based on the applicants' abilities, qualifications, experience and merit as measured against the job description and specification.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend for interview with at least one Manager and/or HR personnel and the Manager responsible for the post. HR personnel will ensure that questions asked of Applicants are in no way discriminatory and focus on their skills, experience and qualifications required to perform the role effectively.

Interviewees will need to provide proof of identity, right to work in the UK, relevant professional qualifications and previous related training. A second interview may be deemed necessary.

The successful Applicant will be informed verbally and in writing of an offer of employment and provided with a Contract of Employment. It will be clearly stated that this offer is 'subject to satisfactory references' i.e. the organisation deeming the proof of experience, qualifications and statutory checks to be satisfactory including verified references and DBS checks for all AFA positions, including those which are office based.

The offer of employment will be accompanied by a written statement of terms of employment particulars and a staff handbook, which will include but not limited to the following subjects:

- The title of the job being offered
- Conditions attached to the offer
- Place of work
- Details of salary, payment intervals and the review date
- Any significant benefits
- The starting date
- The hours of work
- Holiday entitlement
- To whom the new employee should report
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures
- Notice periods
- Confidentiality and data protection agreements
- Key policies

When rejecting job Applicants, the unsuccessful candidates will receive communication from AFA with the offer of feedback from the interview.

The withdrawal of job offers must be made in writing and may be made if, for example, references are not satisfactory or statutory checks return adverse information. All recruitment activities must comply at all times with AFA's Data Protection Policy and processes. Please also note the Agency's privacy policy, which can be found on our website (<https://www.afafostering.com/privacy-policy/>).

All newly recruited staff will undergo an initial 6-month probationary period, followed by an appraisal. There will be a full induction programme offered and mandatory training to complete during the induction and probationary period.

Safer Recruitment: Independent Social Workers (ISW)

When procuring the services of ISW's the Agency will ask that they provide the following:

- Anonymised samples of written/assessment work
- Certificates for qualifications
- Social Work England registration
- Relevant documents for a DBS/ID check. (passport, driving licence and proof of address such as a utility bill or bank statement as well as addresses for the last 5 years). If they have a transferrable DBS, information about this will be needed instead, but driving licence/ID will still need to be seen to confirm identity.
- Proof of car insurance and MOT
- Proof of indemnity insurance
- Proof of ICO registration
- References who can be contacted by AFA

At the point of meeting with the Manager responsible for sourcing the service, the information provided is viewed and an identity form completed and signed. A minimum of two referees are sought from the ISW and need to be provided in writing with consent to approach. The references must be verified on return. A DBS must also be undertaken as ISW's are in a 'position of trust' and may have unsupervised contact with applicants'/Foster Parents' own children and children who are in their care.

ISW's are asked to declare all 'unspent' convictions in line with the expectations detailed on page 2 of this document.

Once all checks have been returned, these will be filed and at that point, information relating to assessments and the Assessor's agreement can be sent to them. If the agency decides not to proceed with using an ISW following the meeting or return of relevant checks, they will advise in writing of this with the offer of feedback from the meeting.

If the services of the ISW are commissioned, AFA will provide them with the relevant documents including:

- Assessor's Agreement, highlighting Data Protection expectations and use of equipment.
- Expectations of fostering assessors.
- Templates for Fostering Assessment Reports and other key documents.
- Charms guide for assessors provided and access given to the Database.
- Information regarding the policy website.

Records of all dialogue, discussions and the sharing of documents/policies etc will be recorded as supervision notes on the ISW's file.

Safer Recruitment: Panel Members

When considering applicants as potential members of the AFA Fostering Panel, the following is completed:

- Application form completed and subsequent interview.
- Social Work England (SWE) registration or other relevant body (if applicable).
- Relevant documents for a DBS/ID check (passport, driving licence and proof of address (such as a utility bill or bank statement) as well as addresses for the last 5 years). If they have a transferrable DBS, information about this will be needed instead, but driving licence/ID will still need to be seen to confirm identity.
- Verified references who can comment on their suitability for the role.
- Non-Disclosure Agreement to enable pre-recruitment activities.

Potential Panel Members are asked to declare all 'unspent' convictions in line with the expectations detailed on page 2 of this document.

Following the above having been completed, a period of induction will take place to include panel observation, relevant induction training, discussion regarding role and responsibilities including the provision of a Panel Handbook and the signing of the Panel Protocol. There is a process of observation of applicants and feedback for an induction period prior to their inclusion in the Central List. Information regarding all of this is included within the Panel Protocol and Handbook. The Panel Induction Checklist will be used to monitor these processes.

The AFA Fostering Panel encourages open and honest feedback from both Panel Members and attendees. If any issues are identified, these will be passed to the Registered Manager and/or HR personnel to consider how best to manage these. Please see below also in relation to the Panel Members' role in approval processes.

Safer Recruitment: Foster Parents

AFA will ensure they are compliant with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011, Standard 13 Recruiting and Assessing Foster Parents who can meet the needs of Looked after Children and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Specific offences being committed or concerns being expressed about the welfare of a child in relation to an Applicant/Foster Parent or a member of the person's household means that they would not be seen as suitable to become a Foster Parent. Details can be found in the Fostering Services NMS Regulation 27.

AFA takes their responsibilities for safeguarding very seriously and as such have a robust process for the assessment and approval of Foster Parents viewing them as 'people in positions of trust' and recognising the need to manage safeguarding arrangements as a result. As part of this, AFA's safeguarding practice includes considering parts of potential or existing Foster Parents' support network who will have ongoing involvement with children and young people.

In recruiting Foster Parents, AFA will undertake the following:

- Consideration of any formal 'Enquiry to Foster' which includes a screening telephone call during which safeguarding practices are discussed (such as suitability).
- Home visit prior to any application being made, which will include discussion relating to assessment processes and checks required as part of the recruitment process. This may be undertaken virtually however it is AFA's policy that no Applicants will be brought to Panel without having had face-to-face visits within the assessment period.
- Completion of an application form, consent to information sharing (for joint Applicants) and ID check form(s). As part of these forms, Applicants are asked to declare all 'unspent' convictions in line with the expectations detailed on page 2 of this policy. All individuals are assured that the presence of a criminal record will not necessarily exclude them from being a Foster Parent with AFA; any criminal background will be assessed by reference to the circumstances and nature of offences and how these relate to the nature of their ability within the fostering role.
- The verification of relevant ID documents for a DBS check (passport, driving licence, proof of address such as a utility bill or bank statement), as well as information regarding addresses for the last 5 years. Everyone aged 18 or over living in or regularly visiting the fostering household will be asked to complete DBS forms and produce the necessary identification. For applicants who have not lived in the UK for the last 10 years, overseas checks will also be completed.
- Checks with Local Authority Children's Social Care Services in whose area the applicant has lived during the last 10 years or, if they have their own children, of any Local Authority where they have lived with those children. This will include asking for a check to be made as to whether any of the applicant's own children have at any time been subject to any Safeguarding procedures. Where applicants have moved to the UK within the last 10 years, checks will be made with the relevant countries for all adults in the household. A check will also be made to ensure that applicants have the right to work in the UK.
- Checks with schools or education establishments where the applicants' children attend.
- Information from any Agency where the applicants have previously applied or been approved as Foster Parents. We are aware that in line with Chapter 3, Section 3.79 of The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, malicious allegations should have been removed from personnel records and unsubstantiated, unfounded and malicious allegations should not be referred to by previous agencies in their references.

- Employment references, including references from any establishments where the applicants have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults at any stage in their lives, including voluntary work.
- A medical assessment and report, which may highlight safeguarding issues.
- Personal references (from at least four referees) who will be contacted for a written reference. Subsequently, their references will be verified, with either a visit or telephone call from the assessor.
- References from ex-partners where there has been a significant relationship, and particularly when there has been joint parenting of children or if the children in the household are under 18 years at the time of the assessment. References from adult children will also be considered in terms of providing information about previous relationships.

All assessments undergo Quality Assurance processes prior to presentation at the Agency's Panel. The Panel view all documents, understand their responsibilities regarding the safer recruitment of Foster Parents and there are processes in place for Panel Members to highlight any safeguarding concerns as soon as they are identified. This is discussed on an ongoing basis through Panel Training and Business days.

For further information regarding assessment and approval processes for Foster Parents, please refer to 'Assessment and Approval of Foster Parents Policy.'

DBS Checks

We consider staff, Foster Parents and independent workers as '*people in positions of trust*' therefore in line with best practice and our own safer recruitment policy we require a DBS check to be undertaken on all of the above at the point of joining and either renewed on a regular 3 yearly basis or submitted to the update service. The below information is to be recorded on the relevant individual's file:

- The date the check was carried out
- The DBS certificate number
- The name of the person who checked the original certificate
- If using the DBS update service, the name of the person who carried out the update check
- Whether there was any information or concerns arising from the check that required further attention before a decision was made to appoint the individual

Ongoing actions to be taken and recorded where appropriate:

- If there were concerns once a person was appointed, the re-checking of person's suitability to continue to work with children
- What actions will be taken if a person changes their role after they have been appointed
- The actions that have been taken in order to protect children from contact with unsuitable persons; this may include referral to the DBS or other relevant authorities

For further information see:

- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations Volume 4
- Children Act 2004

- National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-checking-service-guidance--2>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>
- For guidance on recruitment practice, go to <https://www.acas.org.uk/advice>

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Fostering Social Workers Guidance	Fostering Social Workers and Senior Managers
Equal Opportunities Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Assessment and Approval of Foster Parents	All staff and Foster Parents
Recruitment Policy – Staff Handbook	All staff
Panel Protocol and Handbook	Panel Members and Agency staff involved in Panel.
Staff Handbook	All staff
Data Protection Policy	All staff, Foster Parents, Panel Members, and ISWs
Privacy Policy	All staff, Foster Parents, Panel Members, and ISWs

Revised December 2023

Version 2.5