



Fostering Service

Policy on the delegation of decisions on overnight stays and holidays for looked after children.

Introduction

The content of this policy conforms to the Guidance from the Department of Education 2010, The National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers 2011 and The Fostering Regulations 2011, Care Planning Regulations 2010.

The Children's Minister Tim Loughton called on all local authorities to make it easier for foster carers to make decisions for the children in their care, and to free them from over-zealous restrictions and bureaucracy.

The Minister outlined his concern in regard to excessive restrictions on foster carers imposed by some local authorities. In particular, he is concerned at the persistent myths which are stopping many foster carers making simple decisions about everyday activities for their foster children.

The National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers 2011

Standard 7

7.7 Children can stay overnight, holiday with friends, or friends and relatives of their foster carer, or go on schools trips, subject to requirements of the care/placement plan, if foster carers consider it appropriate in individual circumstances. CRB checks are not normally sought as a precondition.

Statutory Guidance to Fostering Services 2011, (CA89 vol 4)

3.19. In making decisions about whether or not to permit a looked after child to stay overnight with a friend or to have a holiday with their friends or with relatives of their foster carers, or to go on a school trip, foster carers and responsible authorities should consider the following factors:

- Whether there are any relevant restrictions contained for exceptional reasons in the child's care plan, including the placement plan.

- Whether there are any court orders which restrict the child from making a particular overnight stay, visit or holiday.
- Whether there are any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour which would preclude the overnight stay, visit or holiday.
- Whether there are any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed.
- The age and level of understanding of the child concerned.
- What is known about the reasons for the overnight stay, visit or holiday?
- The length of the stay?

If there is doubt about the appropriate decision or if there is reason to consider that a child may be at specific risk in staying in a particular household, the foster carers should consult their Social Worker/Fostering Supervising Social Worker for advice. The child and their carers should always be told of the criteria that will be used to make decisions about overnight stays, visits to others and holidays.

Foster carers should always have contact details for the household in which the child will be staying. They should also make contact with the household beforehand, as would any good parent, to assist in assessing the request and to confirm arrangements and to ensure that the household where the child will be staying have, in turn, the contact details of the foster carer(s).

There is no statutory duty for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures to be sought in relation to adults in a private household where a child may stay overnight or visit, or who the child may accompany on a holiday or on a school trip. CRB checks should not normally be sought as a precondition.

There is no requirement that where a looked after child visits or spends a holiday with their foster carer's friends or relative that the individual must be approved as a local authority foster carer, as the child will remain formally placed with their usual foster carers.

Principles

Clarity in regard to decision making is based on many factors. Partnership working is based on gathering facts based on the child/young person's age, wishes and feelings, legal status and the parent's views as well as the foster carers.

It is accepted that the decision about a child staying overnight with friends should rest with foster carers. Children having holidays or short breaks with friends or relatives can also be delegated to foster carers. This delegation should be written into the placement plan and the child's care plan.

If there is to be an arrangement for overnight stays or holidays either frequently or regularly then consideration to carry out CRB checks should be made for example, if the stay is for 3 nights or is more frequent, then it would be good practice to complete relevant CRB checks and health check with a safety and a safe care plan.

If there is reason to restrict any overnight stays or holidays then this should also be recorded in the placement and care plan with clear stated reasons as to why this is necessary to safeguard and protect the child's safety.

Were a child is to be staying with relatives or friends of foster carers then as stated above there is no requirement for the friends / relatives to be approved as carers.

Any plans for delegation should be written into the placement plan and the child's care plan at the earliest opportunity. Good practice would also be to discuss these arrangements at the CIOC review.

If there is an emergency stay e.g. foster carer is hospitalised and a stay allows a child to be with familiar people in a familiar environment, then if views of the child, foster carer, parent and Social worker are sought and agreed then the stay should be allowed and checks can follow.

Recording

A decision will be made whenever possible following a visit to the proposed address and a meeting with adults in the household. As much information as possible will be gathered using the pro-forma in exceptional circumstances this may be via telephone contact. Details of the visit will be gathered, recorded and available from the foster carer.

It is important that evidence is recorded on how the decision was made about the suitability of the family. The supervising social worker and child's social worker will record the details of the stay as part of the care planning process.

Karen Barrick
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