

CHAPTER 3 FOSTERING SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Foster care is often the best way to provide care and nurture for children who need to be looked after. Fostering is a skilled task needing training and support and foster carers play an important role in the professional team concerned with a child's care.

THE REGULATIONS

- 2 The regulations which govern family placement are:
The Placement of Children (General) Regulations 2002.
The Placement of Children with Parents etc. 2002
- 3 The Placement of Children (General) Regulations cover all placements of children including placement with families and in residential care.
- 4 The Placement of Children with Parents etc. Regulations cover the placement of children in care with a parent, any other person who has parental responsibility, and anyone in whose favour there was a residence order immediately before the care order was made.

THE FOSTERING TASK

- 5 The various aims of foster placement should be identified and understood so that:
 - a. appropriate fostering resources are available,
 - b. foster carers are recruited and prepared,
 - c. clear agreements can be reached with foster carers on the aim of placement, and
 - d. the continuing role of the parent in the child's life can be agreed, where appropriate.
- 6 In the guidance the following broad descriptions are used:
 - a. short term placement,
 - b. respite, and
 - c. long term placement.

See Chapter 4, Foster Placement

- 7 For planning purposes, however, the aim of each placement should be more precise and cover:
 - a. the aim of the placement,
 - b. any specific tasks arising from the aim of the placement, and

- c. the expected duration.

THE FOSTERING SERVICE

- 8 The service is provided either within the Department or by an independent or semi-independent body and should provide organisational and procedural arrangements including management and staffing structures for:
 - a. the recruitment,
 - b. assessment,
 - c. approval,
 - d. preparation, and
 - e. training and support of foster carers.
- 9 The fostering service should ensure that it has policies, structures and schemes of delegation to enable it to:
 - a. approve foster carers,
 - b. review foster carers,
 - c. place children, and, where necessary,
 - d. terminate placement.

Publicity and recruitment

- 10 The current pool of foster carers should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that future needs can be met. Review will enable the fostering service provider to:
 - a. plan the recruitment and training of foster carers,
 - b. use the number and range of fostering resources effectively,
 - c. evaluate the overall strengths and deficiencies of the fostering service,
 - d. anticipate forthcoming changes in the availability of existing foster homes, and
 - e. give foster carers an opportunity to contribute to the planning and development of the service.
- 11 Publicity and recruitment campaigns, resource networks and exchange arrangements should aim to:
 - a. reach all groups in the community, especially where there is or may be a need for foster carers from a particular ethnic, cultural or religious group, and
 - b. increase awareness and understanding generally of the needs of children.

- 12 Recruitment methods may include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. general publicity and recruitment campaigns to raise awareness of fostering and the needs of children, including open meetings and opportunities to meet experienced foster carers, and b. schemes to recruit specialised foster carers or meet the needs of a particular child. <p>13 Foster families suited to caring for children with particular needs may be identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. in the course of general recruitment campaigns, b. advertising in magazines and other specialist media, and c. consultation with disability and ethnic minority organisations which may be able to assist in planning a suitable recruitment campaign. <p>14 The fostering service provider should develop policies and guidelines on publicity to recruit foster carers for individual children, so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the wishes and feelings of children and their families are properly considered and b. confidential information is not disclosed. <p>15 The scope for co-operation with other agencies should be explored, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the co-ordination of joint publicity and family finding campaigns and b. agreements with voluntary organisations which have developed or specialist fostering schemes. <p>Assessment</p> <p>16 All enquirers should be given a positive and welcoming response.</p> <p>17 Whenever possible, enquiries should be seen as offering potential assistance to the fostering service. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. even if an applicant's initial preferences do not meet the immediate needs of the fostering service, mutual exploration may lead an enquiry towards undertaking a different kind of fostering, or b. work with a befriending scheme, youth club or out of school scheme may be an appropriate alternative to fostering. <p>18 The fostering service should also keep in mind for future needs enquirers who initially respond to an advertisement for a specific child.</p> <p>19 Discussion should be open and honest to avoid unrealistic expectations, for example, of a short placement "turning into" a long term one.</p> <p>20 The assessment process should enable an applicant to opt out after</p>
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learning more about what fostering involves.

- 21 The various aspects of assessment should be made quite clear to applicants, including:
- a. when they are being assessed as foster carers, and when they are participating in an exchange of information.
 - b. the need for visits from social workers,
 - c. the timescale of assessment,
 - d. the enquiries and investigations to be made, and
 - e. the records to be kept if the application is successful.

- 22 The fostering service needs to obtain full information and consider a range of factors, so as to assess whether an applicant may be suitable to be a foster carer and whether his or her household is suitable for a child to be placed in.

Applications from couples

- 23 When a married applicant applies both partners should be assessed and approved.
- 24 This principle should be followed whenever responsibility for the care of the child is to be shared by two people in a household, for example, mother and daughter. The aim should be to identify all the factors which contribute to a general picture of the applicants, their family, and way of life.

THE ROLE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE PROVIDER

- 25 The assessment role includes:
- a. obtaining information about the prospective foster carer and the members of his or her household,
 - b. interviewing two people nominated as referees by the prospective foster carer,
 - c. seeking and taking account of the Department's views,
 - d. considering, in the light of this information, the suitability for the child of the applicant and his or her household,
 - e. preparing a report,
 - f. referring the application to the fostering panel and notifying the prospective foster carer that this has been done.

The fostering service provider's first duty

- 26 Both the service provider (the Department or otherwise) and those interested in becoming foster carers should understand that the fostering decisions must centre exclusively on the interests of the child. The primary duty is always to find and approve the most

	<p>suitable foster carer for the particular child who needs to be placed with a family.</p> <p>27 No group of people should be arbitrarily excluded from consideration as foster carers. Similarly no one has a 'right' to be a foster carer.</p> <p>Information to be sought about applicants</p> <p>28 The information to be sought on the prospective foster carer and his or her household ought to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. written information, and b. information to be sought at first hand. <p>Gathering written information</p> <p><i>Medical reports</i></p> <p>29 A medical report will be the best source of information about an applicant's health. Primary health care staff familiar with the family may also be able to help.</p> <p>30 Professional advice should be available to help interpret health information and to advise on the extent to which the health of the applicant may affect the capacity to act as a foster carer.</p> <p>31 Professional advice would also be required to assess the deteriorating health of an established foster carer.</p> <p><i>Birth and marriage certificates, etc.</i></p> <p>32 Papers which relate to the applicant's history, such as birth and marriage certificates or naturalisation documents should always be seen. Marital status will become significant should adoption ever be considered.</p> <p><i>Police and other checks</i></p> <p>33 Applicants are required to provide written consent so that police records can be checked for previous convictions. A record of convictions should not necessarily preclude appointment as a foster carer, but it will necessitate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. careful consideration and b. consultation with senior staff. <p>34 The police should also be asked to check the records of all other members of the household. These people will need to give their permission.</p> <p>35 The Department should check its own records on both the applicant and other members of his or her household.</p> <p>Visiting the household</p> <p>36 A social worker should visit the prospective foster carer's home on at least one occasion at a time when he or she can meet the entire household and explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the relationships of all the members,
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. the extent to which other members of the household may participate in the care and daily life of a foster child, and c. the demands which are made on the applicants by other members of the household, such as elderly relatives requiring care. <p>37 The social worker should investigate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the suitability of the accommodation, b. access to schools, c. public transport and other amenities. <p>38 If fostering a child with special needs is under consideration, the social worker should also consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. whether the accommodation is suitable, b. the ready availability of appropriate medical support, c. whether or not the local education system will be able to provide for the child's special needs. <p>39 The social worker should ensure that he or she talks to the children of the family and discovers their feelings about the introduction of a foster child into the family.</p> <p>40 If the foster carer has children who are not living in the household, the extent of contact with them should be explored. When the child is over 16 and the degree of contact and involvement in the household is significant it may be appropriate to follow the advice above about police checks.</p> <p>41 It may be useful to draw on the health visitor's knowledge of the family – with the family's knowledge - to form a view of parenting capacity. For example, what is the applicant's experience of caring for children of different age groups, including other people's children?</p> <p>42 If the prospective foster carer lives in or has recently moved from another authority's area their views should be sought.</p> <p>43 When there has been a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency should be consulted.</p> <p><i>Religion</i></p> <p>44 The social worker should aim to understand the extent to which religion influences the foster carer's family life in order to assess his or her capacity to care for a child with a particular religion, or from a more or less religious background than him- or herself.</p> <p>45 The following questions might be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. how much familiarity or sympathy does she or he have with other faiths?
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- b. to what extent would the child be expected to take part in the household's religious life and how far would this be compatible with the expectations of the child and his or her parents.

Ethnicity

- 46 Where the child is known to come from a particular minority ethnic group or cultural background, the social worker should enquire about:
- a. the prospective foster carer's understanding of that culture and language, and
 - b. how far he or she is prepared to develop an understanding. The social worker should offer advice if necessary.

Attitude towards family contact

- 47 The social worker should seek to understand the applicant's attitudes and expectations in relation to:
- a. contact between parents and children,
 - b. visits by parents and relatives to the foster parents' home, and
 - c. working with parents to achieve the aims of the placement.
- 48 The applicant should be aware of the implications of working with parents and be prepared to accept training and support in working in partnership with parents.

Standard of living and life style

- 49 The social worker should form a view on the following points:
- a. the family's leisure activities and interests,
 - b. how employment/occupation affect family life,
 - c. the time available for family activities,
 - d. if the principal care giver is employed outside the home, the arrangements to ensure proper care for a foster child after school and during sickness and holidays,
 - e. the opportunities available for the child to see other families, to mix with children in the applicant's circle and in the community, and to participate in activities appropriate to his or her age and interests.

Attitudes towards child rearing

- 50 Views should also be formed of the applicant's attitudes and expectations in relation to:
- a. child rearing,
 - b. looking after someone else's child,
 - c. understanding of fostering,

- d. the applicant's capacity to provide a foster child with protection, nurture and opportunities for development, and
- e. his or her preference and suitability as a foster parent for any particular group of children or for any particular fostering tasks.

Education

- 51 The social worker's should enquire into the applicant's views and expectations of education, including:
- a. recognition of the need to provide educational support and the capacity to do so
 - b. interest in encouraging the development of special talents and interests, including those which call for additional or out of school arrangements
 - c. whether or not the children of the family attend fee paying schools
 - d. capacity to understand particular educational methods, settings and services
 - e. capacity to cope with the challenge of providing support to a child with special educational needs.

Discipline

- 52 The applicant's views on discipline should also be explored including readiness to:
- a. accept that corporate punishment is inappropriate for children in foster placements and
 - b. undertake not to use such forms of punishment.
- 53 This should include:
- a. slapping,
 - b. pinching,
 - c. squeezing,
 - d. shaking,
 - e. throwing missiles,
 - f. rough handling, and
 - g. punching or pushing in the heat of the moment in response to violence from young people.
- 54 Attitudes to other forms of inappropriate control should also be explored, such as:
- a. refusing a child meals,
 - b. restricting contact with the family and friends should not be

used as a punishment.

Taking up references

- 55 Applicants are required to name two referees who are prepared to be interviewed.
- 56 A referee should be able to comment on the applicant's sense of responsibility including:
- a. his or her knowledge, understanding and love of children,
 - b. evidence of sound relationships,
 - c. his or her motivation to foster children, and
 - d. his or her personality.
- 57 Additional information will be necessary if the referees are not able to provide all of it. This might come from a member of the applicant's wider family.

Preparing the report

- 58 The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F is recommended for the report on the basis of which the decision to approve the application or not will be taken.
- 59 Approval may be restricted to a named child or children.
- 60 The content of the report should normally be shared with the prospective foster parent, subject to:
- a. the requirements of legislation,
 - b. guidance on disclosure of records, and
 - c. avoiding disclosure of information given in confidence by referees, or other agencies or professionals.

ASSESSMENT OF RELATIVES AND FAMILY FRIENDS AS FOSTER CARERS

- 61 The possibility of a child being cared for within his or her extended family should be considered as an alternative to the provision of accommodation by the responsible authority.
- 62 Even if it becomes necessary for the responsible authority to arrange accommodation, placement with a relative will often provide the best opportunities for promoting family links in a familiar setting.
- 63 The Placement of Children with Parents etc. Regulations 2002 apply to the placement of a child with a relative or friend. This may include allowing a child to remain with the relative or friend with whom he or she was living when the need for accommodation arose.
- 64 The assessment process can focus on the suitability of a particular relative or friend in respect only of a particular child or children.
- 65 Assessment of relatives as foster parents must take account of the

possible effect of the placement on the child's other family relationships, including contact with either or both parents.

66 If contact with one or both parents has been terminated or restricted, the fostering service provider and the prospective foster carers should consider any difficulties the latter may encounter in maintaining the conditions or restrictions.

67 The fostering service provider should be prepared to provide support if the foster carer experiences difficulty, e.g. if his or her loyalty is strained as a result of receiving confidential information not available to other family members, especially if the child has experienced abuse, including sexual abuse.

Linking decision-making in these cases to the arrangements for complying with the Placement of Children with Parents etc. Regulations may help to ensure consistency of decision-making.

APPROVAL

Decision making procedures

68 The Department has a fostering panel with the function of considering applications for the approval of foster carers.

69 The fostering service provider should make known to prospective foster carers the procedure for deciding on approval.

70 A foster carer may be approved to provide care for:

- a. a particular named child or children,
- b. a certain number of children,
- c. an age range of children,
- d. placements of a particular kind, or
- e. in any particular circumstances

Notification of the decision

71 Notice of approval should be given in writing. The decision should also be communicated personally by a social worker.

72 The notice should state the terms of approval clearly.

73 If the application is refused, the reasons for the decision together with the fostering panel's recommendation should be explained as fully as possible.

74 A full record of both the decision and the decision-making process should be kept.

Representations procedure

75 If the fostering service provider considers that an application should not be recommended for approval the notice informing the applicant

should also invite him or her to submit written representations within 28 days of the date of the notice.

- 76 If the fostering service provider receives any representations it should:
- a. refer them to the fostering panel for further consideration, and
 - b. make its decision, taking in account any new recommendation made by the panel.
- 77 The fostering service provider should notify the prospective foster carer in writing as soon as possible after it has made its new decision.
- 78 If the decision is to approve the applicant as a foster carer the fostering service provider should give notice of the terms of approval.
- 79 If the decision is not to approve, the fostering service provider should provide written reasons for its decision.
- 80 The outcome should also be notified to any professionals who have contributed to the assessment, such as health visitors or GPs.

THE FOSTER CARE AGREEMENT

- 81 The fostering service provider should enter into a written agreement with a foster parent at the time of approval.
- 82 The purpose of the agreement is to provide written information about the terms and conditions of the partnership between the fostering service provider and the foster carer. It also provides foster carer with written confirmation of matters which should be discussed and agreed during assessment.
- 83 The obligations to be covered in the foster care agreement are set out below. These are minimums and agreements should not necessarily be restricted to these matters but should ensure that foster parents have a full understanding of what is expected on behalf of both foster carer and fostering service provider when a child is placed.
- 84 The fostering service provider and the foster carer must also enter into a specific foster placement agreement when an individual child is placed

See Chapter 4.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

- 85 Preparation should begin as part of the assessment process when the foster carer learns about foster care and what is required of a foster carer.

	<p>86 After approval, the social worker and foster carer should agree on what further preparation and training is needed in the early months, before a child is placed, and continuing beyond placement.</p> <p>87 Opportunities for training and support should be provided at three levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. support, discussion and evaluation at home, b. participation in foster carer groups, and c. participation in formal training events with other foster carers and social workers. <p>88 Appropriate training resources are required to meet the needs of foster carers. The National Foster Care Association is a valuable source.</p> <p>89 The matters to be addressed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. working with parents, b. children's health needs, including undetected conditions, c. undisclosed child abuse, including sexual abuse, d. working with parents and children in the context of a multi-ethnic society, e. developing positive attitudes towards less advantaged groups, f. understanding the factors which suggest a child may be at risk, and the implications for family life and the child's care, and g. the support the fostering service provider has a responsibility to provide. <p>90 Foster carers undertaking some tasks or participating in certain schemes, e.g. the care of sexually abused children or young offenders, need specialised preparation and training.</p> <p>91 Opportunities for continuing training should be available for all foster parents.</p> <p>92 Professionals from other services and agencies can be asked to contribute to training. Health service professionals may be willing to speak on such matters as helping adolescents with developing sexuality or the health care needs of children from minority groups.</p> <p>93 The fostering service provider should ensure that support is available for foster parents over difficulties that arise from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the special demands of the fostering role, and b. the care of a particular child. <p>94 Support may be required to:</p>
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- a. cope with the demands of fostering on family relationships,
- b. deal with ambivalent attitudes from neighbours, or
- c. a lack of understanding and co-operation on the part of other agencies.

95 The fostering service provider can help for example by:

- a. demonstrating confidence in the foster carer,
- b. ensuring that professionals in other services know of a placement and of the foster parent's responsibilities, e.g. by providing letters of introduction,
- c. providing the foster carer with his or her own social worker who can be available for general advice and support, as well as
- d. access to the child's social worker for support, advice and assistance, in relation to that child,
- e. access to experienced foster carers, and foster carer or foster family groups, and
- f. access to the support of professionals in other services which is available to all parents in the community.

REVIEW OF APPROVAL

96 The fostering service provider should review the approval of a foster carer:

- a. not later than a year after approval, and
- b. subsequently whenever it considers necessary but at intervals of no more than two years.

97 Annual review will normally be sufficient, but changes of circumstance such as change of address, death of spouse, remarriage or change in health, would usually make a review necessary.

Foster carer review procedure

98 The review procedure should be set out in the foster care agreement.

99 The regulations require that the procedure should seek and take into account the views of:

- a. the foster carer,
- b. the children placed with the foster carer, depending on their age and understanding,
- c. any responsible authority which has a child currently placed with foster carer, or has done so within the preceding year,
- d. all the authorities using the services of a particular foster

home should contribute to the review as a means of maintaining good understanding, and identifying and resolving any difficulties.

- 100 The review should focus on the foster parent rather than the current placement. If possible, it should be carried out by a social worker with responsibility to the fostering service who may not be the social worker of the child in placement.
- 101 The review should include:
- a. a visit to the foster home,
 - b. discussion with the foster parent,
 - c. discussion with the child, and
 - d. meeting other members of the household.
- 102 The review should be an opportunity for airing and discussion of the foster carer's view of the service offered by the fostering service provider, and of the foster carer's experience and any difficulties arising.
- 103 Foster carers should be offered the opportunity to give their views in writing in advance of the review, unless they prefer their views to be recorded during the discussion.

Both the review and the decision taken should be recorded.

Reviewing the terms of approval

- 104 The extent to which reviews include a comprehensive reassessment of a foster parent should depend on individual circumstances. A full re-assessment may only be needed if it is agreed that a foster parent should seek approval for a different kind of placement, perhaps to care for sexually abused children or to participate in a special scheme.
- 105 Non use or under use of a foster home should also be investigated to increase understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the fostering service as a whole.

Investigating allegations

- 106 If allegations against the foster carer are made by a child, a parent or another person, review of approval may be required.
- 107 Procedures for investigating allegations must protect the child's welfare first and foremost.
- 108 The procedures should also take account of the sensitivities and rights of the other parties including the foster carers, including full opportunity for the foster carer to present his or her case.
- 109 If it is decided to leave the child in the placement during an

investigation, additional support and supervision should be provided.

The fostering review report

110 Following a review the fostering service provider should prepare a written report stating:

- a. whether the individual continues to be suitable to act as foster carer of any child for whom approval has been given, and his or her household continues to be suitable, and
- b. whether the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate.

111 When the first review is undertaken, and on any subsequent occasion, the fostering service provider should submit the report to the fostering panel for their consideration.

The outcome of the review

112 If the fostering service provider decides, taking account of any recommendation made by the fostering panel, that the foster carer and his or her household are still suitable, and the terms of the approval are appropriate, it should notify the foster carer in writing.

113 If the fostering service provider decides that it is no longer satisfied with the suitability of the foster carer or his or her household, it should:

- a. give the foster carer written notice that it proposes to terminate approval or revise the terms, and
- b. invite him or her to make written representations within 28 days of the date of the notice.

114 If no representations are received the fostering service provider may proceed to make its decision.

115 If the fostering service provider receives written representations within the specified time it must:

- a. refer the case to the fostering panel for its consideration, and
- b. make its decision in the light of any recommendation from the panel.

116 The fostering service provider should give the foster carer written notice as soon as possible after it has decided that either:

- a. the foster carer and his or her household continue to be suitable and the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate, or
- b. his or her approval is terminated from a specified date, and the reasons, or

- c. the revised terms of approval and the reasons for the revision.

TERMINATION OF APPROVAL

- 117 When a decision is taken to terminate approval, the decision and the reasons should be generally discussed with the foster parent before the statutory notice is issued.
- 118 If the foster carer no longer wishes to act as a foster carer he or she may give written notice to the fostering service provider at any time. Approval will then be terminated 28 days from receipt of the notice.
- 119 Approval must be formally terminated when it is decided that the foster parent is no longer suitable. It is not sufficient to avoid placing further children.
- 120 Notice of termination should also be given where a foster carer decides to give up fostering unless he or she intends to resume after a short break.
- 121 A notice of termination should also be issued when it is clear that a foster carer does not intend to continue or resume fostering, even if no formal notice of resignation has been received.

Notification of termination

- 122 As long as foster parents remain formally approved, their services are available to other responsible authorities. Copies of notices of re-approval and termination should be sent to any other authority using the foster home and taking part in the review.
- 123 Good practice requires that the outcome of the review should normally be discussed with the other authorities before a final decision is reached. If the outcome of a review means that a child is to be moved from the foster home, plans for the termination of the placement must be agreed between the authorities and the foster parent, unless the child has to be removed at once to safeguard and protect his or her welfare.
- 124 Plans will need to be made in consultation with the child, parents and other individuals significantly involved.

COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

- 125 It is essential that foster carers should be able to make representations about disputes and discuss facts connected with their service as foster carers.
- 126 These may include:
- a. disputes about the care of a child,
 - b. dissatisfaction with the services or support provided,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">c. decisions about the usual fostering limit, ord. requests for review of decisions such as refusal of approval, termination of approval or termination of a placement. <p>127 The Department may wish to extend its statutory complaints procedures under the Children and Young Person's Act 2001 to include complaints made by foster parents</p>
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