**Hello and Welcome to your Foster Carer’s Handbook!**

Welcome to this online resource, your Foster Carer’s Handbook, now accessible on the web. Whether you are a first-time visitor or a returning user, we recommend going through the ‘How to Use this Handbook' guide to acquaint yourself with its layout and features. We are relaunching our Foster Carer’s Handbook to update our foster carers on the latest policies and One Minute Guides for example, but also to make it more user friendly and streamlined, keeping everything you need as foster carers in one place – all specific with Coventry.

This handbook is tailored for both newly approved and experienced foster carers, offering practical insights into your daily responsibilities. You can easily navigate through this handbook using the contents page.

For additional resources, explore <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/fostering>, through your online account, where you can find learning and development opportunities, as well as information on fostering events.

## Refer a friend for £500

Do you know anyone who would make a great foster carer for Coventry? If you do and you refer them to us, you'll get £500 when they're approved.

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## **Introduction**

The Foster Carer’s Handbook has been created with the intention of assisting all foster carers approved by Coventry City Council. This handbook encompasses the policies, procedures, and guidance of the Fostering Service, addressing the myriad of common scenarios encountered by foster carers in their day-to-day responsibilities. The content has been crafted in an easy-to-understand manner to provide awareness into the expectations of your Fostering Service.

Moreover, it relates to the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and to the relevant Training, Support, and Development Standards. The handbook is a valuable resource for your learning and development, especially in the context of meeting the induction Standards. Please us this link to refer to the relevant National Minimum Standards: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/192705/NMS\_Fostering\_Services.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf%20%20%20)

Recognising, the pivotal role foster carers play in the lives of children in care and their families, it is vital to equip you with the necessary tools to carry out this task effectively. This handbook serves as one such tool, complementing the support of various professionals you will collaborate with, including your Supervising Social Worker and associated foster carers.

This marks the beginning of a remarkable journey for both you and the children and young people you will be working with.

## **How to Use this Handbook**

For individuals with visual impairments, accessing this Handbook may pose challenges. To adjust text size and layout, utilise the accessibility buttons located on the right-hand panel of each page, resembling this icon: Click a larger button to increase your text size, with the highest being the high visibility mode. This Handbook encompasses essential policies and procedures dispersed across various sections, all accessible on pages, such as "About Us" and "Being a Foster Carer."

If you struggle to locate the information you need, please do contact your Supervising Social Worker.

In this handbook, we use specific terms and post titles, defined as follows:

* **Supervising Social Worker:** This refers to the designated, suitably qualified social worker responsible for supervising and supporting you as a foster carer.
* **Children’s Social Worker:** This denotes the assigned social worker, responsible for managing the child's case.
* **Fostering Service:** This denotes the service provided by the Fostering Service.
* **Fostering Operational Lead:** This is the registered manager of the Fostering Service.
* **Placement Plan:** This is the documentation created by the child's social worker, ideally before the time the child comes to live with you (or within 5 working days of the child living with you, if not possible), outlining in detail the arrangements for the child's care in your home.

Additionally, there are One Minute Guides covering numerous areas for foster carers, please use this link to access: [Fostering One Minute Guides – Coventry City Council](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/foster-carers/fostering-one-minute-guides/4)

Every effort has been made to ensure regulatory compliance. If you come across any errors or mistakes, or have comments or suggestions regarding this handbook, kindly consult your Supervising Social Worker.

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This Handbook is intended to be viewed online, but if you need a hard copy of any sections, please ask your Supervising Social Worker.

**Coventry City Council -** [Statement of Purpose](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31786/fostering_service_statement_of_purpose#:~:text=Coventry%20Fostering%20Service%20believes%20that,and%20opportunities%20as%20all%20children.)

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 16 - Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Part 2 - Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide.

## **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 2 - Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.
1. **Equality and Diversity for Children and Young People**
* We encourage children to develop respect for themselves and for others.
* We deliver services that recognise and build on the strengths of children and young people from all cultures, religions, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability and backgrounds; in ways that meet their needs and help them to achieve their full potential.
* Foster carers should ensure every effort is made to ensure that homes are welcoming to all children and young people and others significant in their care and wellbeing. In addition to this, resources used to develop work with children and young people are chosen for their suitability, positive image and anti-oppressive nature.
* Children and young people are offered opportunities to try out new experiences, which are not restricted by traditional gender options.
* Foster carers are expected to challenge attitudes, behaviour and language that are non-inclusive and discriminatory, in a positive way.
1. **Inclusion for Children and Young People**
* All children/young people are given the opportunity to be cared for and educated. Where possible this is alongside their peers in order to develop each child to reach their full potential.
* Children/young people are encouraged and supported to understand their rights and be well-informed about ways of challenging discrimination. See <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/childrens-social-care/young-peoples-guide-making-social-care-complaint/print#:~:text=phone%20Customer%20Services%20on%2008085,help%20you%20make%20your%20complaint>.
* Foster carers are expected to identify local community resources that contribute to meeting the needs of children/young people - these are highlighted and promoted and where they do not meet required needs, alternatives are sought by foster carers and suitably identified regardless of geographical location. For example, hairdressers who specialise in braiding or cutting African Caribbean hair, shops which sell culturally appropriate foods. Discussions about these issues need to be addressed at the Placement Planning Meeting and reviewed at the child’s looked after review.
* Additional support accessed through supervision by your Supervising Social Worker and training will be offered to foster carers who are finding difficulty in understanding diverse or complex situations for children. Details of training can be found at the [Foster Carer Learning and Development Portfolio (Coventry City Council website)](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/3874/foster_carers_training_brochure_2015-16).
1. **Equality in Employment**
* Coventry Fostering Service does not discriminate, whether consciously or subconsciously, in making decisions.
* All decisions on promotion and advancement shall be made in accordance to these guidelines and will be made on merit.
* We will adopt a consistent, non-discriminatory approach to foster carer recruitment and marketing.
* We will not confine our recruitment to areas or media sources, which provide only, or mainly, applicants of a particular group.
* All applications will be treated equitably suitability to foster will be the only factor taken into account.
* Everyone involved in recruiting, assessing, approving and supervising foster carer will reassess their selection criteria on a regular basis to make sure they align with the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum standards and do not illegally discriminate.
* We will not disqualify any applicant because they are unable to complete an application unassisted.
* Selection decisions are not influenced by the perceived bias of other members of the service.

**4. Disability Discrimination**

* We are committed to provide a warm, relaxed, and user-friendly atmosphere that is secure and convenient for foster carers. To guarantee equitable access to its amenities, we shall work to attain equality of opportunity for everyone. Wherever feasible, we will steer clear of design elements that pose challenges for persons with disabilities and implement workable changes to enhance the environment with reasonable adjustments.

## **Foster Carers Charter**

The Foster Carers’ Charter was produced by The Fostering Network in collaboration from organisations including the Department for Education, ADCS, and FosterTalk.

In September 2022 we asked Coventry foster carers their views on the Foster Carer Charter and held focus groups to discuss it with them.

After the consultation, ‘Foster for Coventry’, was changed to ‘Foster with Coventry’ as part of the commitment to promote working together and embed this with our carers, across the service and the Council as a whole.

The Charter was rewritten, and a launch took place in November 2022 with foster carers, staff, leaders and Councillors who signed a pledge to commit to working ‘with’ each other as professionals who look after children who live in our care.

The Charter represents a commitment by the placing authority, fostering service, and foster carers to work together in the best interests of the children in their care.

For more information, click the provided links:

[Click here to view the Fostering Network Foster Carers Charter](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/our-campaigns/foster-carers-charter-0).

[Click here to view the Coventry City Council - Foster Carers' Charter and Support Strategy](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/1390/foster_carers_charter_and_support_strategy).

## **Coventry Children’s Pledge**

The Coventry Pledge is a set of promises made to children and young people who are in the care of the Council. For more information, click the provided link:

[Coventry Children’s Pledge](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/36/childrens_health_and_wellbeing/777/coventry_pledge/1)

## **Foster Carer’s Association (FCA)**

All Coventry Local Authority Foster Carers are automatically enrolled as members of the Coventry Foster Carers Association (CFCA). One of the primary goals of CFCA is to collaborate with our partners to enhance the quality of care, not only for foster carers but, more importantly, for our children in care.

The Foster Carer’s Association are a group of carers that meet regularly to support each other and works with social care colleagues to improve the outcomes for our young people.  The Fostering Operational Lead attends the latter part of each meeting to hear and respond to fosters carer’s views. Other members of Children’s Services also attend on request. These groups provide foster carers with opportunities to connect, build networks, offer mutual support to combat isolation, and host multiple events throughout the year, allowing fostering families to socialise. Furthermore, they host social events for foster carers and their families.

One of the primary aims for the CFCA is to work together with partners to ensure that the experience of care is the best it can be for the foster carer but more importantly for our children. The CFCA meets informally every month for a coffee and to support each other. It is a supportive group of like-minded people who welcome new faces.

There are also different social groups across the city and Bedworth to give carers the opportunity to meet, grow networks and support each other.

This support helps to prevent fostering in isolation, and also encourages carers to share good practice and information. The group hosts various events throughout the year, giving fostering families the opportunity to meet socially, they have been bowling, ice skating and to theme parks together. The group also work closely with our authority colleagues to give ideas and feedback in order to enhance the provision.

There is a closed Facebook group – Coventry FCA which new carers are encouraged to join. In order to do so, new carers will need to request to be a friend of Admin: Karen Dodd or Chair of the group: Nicky Jones and request to join the group FCA stating who their Supervising Social Worker is.

## **Being a Foster Carer**

Standards and Regulations:

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 14 – Fostering Panels and the Fostering Service's Decision-Maker.
* Standard 16 – Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* PART 2 - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.

## **What Happens now I am Approved?**

Congratulations! Now that you have been approved as a foster carer, you will be assigned a Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Service. They will ensure that you receive all the necessary information and support to provide the best possible homes for children and young people.

Your approval as a foster carer will undergo regular reviews, which you can learn more about in the "Reviewing my Approval and Appeals" section. You will also be asked to enter into a Foster Care Agreement with the Fostering Service.

## **Foster Carer’s Role**

* Providing a safe and caring environment for the child/young person.
* Supporting and meeting the health needs of the child/young person.
* Ensuring a child/young person’s attendance at educational settings including nursery, school, college and any placement. Encouraging them to learn and helping them with their homework.
* Contributing to life story work while a child is with you.
* Supporting and, if appropriate, facilitating family time with a child’s birth family and significant others.
* Supporting and, if appropriate, facilitating the transition between a fostering home and an adoptive or other home.
* Establishing routine, clear boundaries and having an understanding of issues that impact upon the child/young person.
* Supporting and promoting the child’s development so they can achieve their full potential and have the best life chances.

Preparing the child/young person for independence, adoption or special guardianship.

**What do I need to know about a child before they come to live with me**

When the Fostering Service seeks a home for a child or young person within your approval category, a social worker from the service will contact you. During this process, you should ensure that the child or young person is the best fit for your care, you and your family. It's helpful to prepare a list of questions to ask when they contact you. If you have any doubts or concerns about a child coming to live with you, it's crucial to discuss them. The service is able to arrange additional support for you if you are not certain about whether you have the skills to meet the needs of a child you have been asked to care for.

You may want to inquire about receiving as much information as possible about the child or young person before their arrival in your home. Normally, you should receive written information from the child's social worker before, although in emergency situations, there may be slight delays, but these should not exceed five days. Information cannot be withheld from you without managerial approval, and this is reserved for rare cases.

As a foster carer, you will need to know information about a child’s health, education and development, identity needs, current arrangements for seeing their family as well as the circumstances which led to them being placed in a fostering family. It is important for you to know who and what is special to the child and any information that previous carers can share about their interests or routines to aid a smooth transition and help a child to settle in your care.

## **Meeting the child or young person**

Wherever possible, there should be a period of introductions between you, your family, and the child. This process should involve an opportunity for the child to get to know you a little and get a sense of what living with you will be like. You will want to share with them general information about your home for example activities, visitors and some initial information about routines. The child should also be encouraged to express their expectations to address any concerns before they move to live with you.

If it is not possible for the child to meet your family before they move in, your fostering social worker will share a copy of your family profile with the child instead. Your family profile will give them information about:

* your home
* members of your household
* your pets (if you have any)
* your family network

## **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

Foster homes are also required for children who have arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, unaccompanied migrant children, or child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking. If you have a child placed with you in such a situation, the Placement Plan and future reviews will provide guidance on how to support the child, particularly in terms of cultural needs and addressing any trauma they may have experienced. Your Supervising Social Worker can assist in gaining a better understanding of the circumstances and the available support for both you and the child.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children, when under the care of a local authority, are entitled to the same support as other children in care. They should have a safe and stable placement, receive appropriate care, and access the necessary support for their education and other outcomes. Some unaccompanied children, especially recent arrivals, may require time in an environment where their educational needs are assessed and integrated into their Personal Education Plan (PEP). They may need time to prepare for formal education and receive initial education related to their age-appropriate cultural orientation and life skills. As a foster carer, you play a significant role in this process.

## **The Child's Care Plan**

This outlines the necessary actions to meet the child's needs. The social worker responsible for the child holds specific responsibility for advice and support regarding the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan.

## **The Child’s Placement Plan**

This involves the Supervising Social Worker, you, the child/young person, family members, and the child's social worker. The plan is drawn up within five days of a child coming to live with you by the Child’s social worker. This plan covers various aspects of care and during the meeting, everyone is able to discuss the following:

* the purpose of the placement
* who can make decisions ([delegated authority](https://handbook.kentfostering.co.uk/during-a-placement/making-decisions))
* any agreements about health or educational needs
* the child’s personal history
* the child’s likes and dislikes
* the child's routines
* your family's safer caring plan and ground rules
* family time between the child, their family and relevant individuals
* when you and the child will get social work visits.

## **Children’s Guide**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 16 - Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Part 2 - Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide.

Furthermore, the child/young person should receive a guide when they move in to live with their foster carer. This guide provides information to help children and young people understand foster care, their rights, and how to contact relevant people, such as their Independent Reviewing Officer, if they wish to raise concerns. It also explains the information kept by the children’s services, who it may be shared with, and their right to access their case file. It is important to discuss this guide with the child/young person in language they can understand. If the child needs the Children's Guide in another format, such as a different language or Makaton, the child’s social worker should provide it.

Please click on this link to view the Children’s Guide: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/thechildrensguide>

## **Foster Care Agreement**

Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Schedule 5 - Matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.

The Foster Care Agreement is a written contract between you and the Fostering Service, which is established upon your approval as a foster carer. This document outlines the expectations of the Fostering Service concerning your role, what you can provide, and the support and training you can anticipate. Within this agreement you are required to:

* Read and sign the Foster Care Agreement, keep one copy for yourself and return one signed copy to the Fostering Service.
* Following any change to your terms of approval and every Foster Home Review, you will receive an amended copy of the Foster Care Agreement which you will need to sign again as above.

The agreement will include:

* Terms of approval
* Support and training
* The review process
* The procedure for making comments, compliments, and complaints.

It will also cover your everyday tasks, such as:

* To care for the child with at least the same care and concern as you would if they were your own, keep them safe and promote their welfare.
* To keep the Fostering Service updated on the child’s progress and any significant events that affect the child.
* Never inflict physical punishment.
* To ensure all information about any child that comes to live with you, is kept confidential, unless the Fostering Service says you can share it.
* To attend relevant meetings including Child Protection Conferences and Reviews concerning the child/young person and provide written reports if needed and support the child/young person for these meetings. To carry out their duties from the child’s [Placement Plan](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/placement_plan.html).
* To work within the Fostering Service’s policies and procedures and guidance.
* To allow members of the Fostering Service to visit your home.

You should promptly inform the Fostering Service of any changes or events that may affect your ability to fulfil the agreement, such as:

* Any change of address or people living in the household.
* Any changes in your personal situation or events which affect their ability to care for the child placed with them.
* Any criminal convictions or cautions or criminal charges pending at any time following your approval as a foster carer, involving you or someone in your household.
* If you or any member of your household decide to foster or adopt children.
* Any request to be a registered childminder or day care provider by someone living in your household.

**Creating a Safer Caring Plan**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 3 - Promoting Positive Behaviour and Relationships.
* Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children.
* Standard 6 - Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 6 - Keep children and young people safe from harm.
* Standard 7 - Develop yourself.

Every foster carer should have been provided with a book from The Fostering Network which covers aspects of Safer Caring to refer to as well.

Creating a Safer Caring Plan for your family, including your foster child, does not imply changing everything you do. It means evaluating which aspects of your family's behaviour involve risk and devising ways to integrate safer care into your everyday life, a topic typically covered in the Skills to Foster course.

This plan also helps you navigate situations that may be acceptable in your own family but not in a foster family. It is essential for everyone in the household to be aware of and agree to the plan, including regular visitors. The entire family should be involved in developing and periodically reviewing the plan, with support from your Supervising Social Worker and the child's social worker.

As a minimum, the plan will need to be reviewed with your supervising social worker following any new child coming to live with you, following a change in safer caring needs in the household (e.g. a new behaviour or a change in household membership) and at each review.

The goal is to ensure that all parties involved understand what might occur and to prevent the child from feeling worried or anxious. You should also consider the Safer Caring Plan when going on holiday.

It is crucial for foster children to have positive adult role models, especially if they have had negative relationships with adults or adult carers in the past. If there's more than one foster carer in the household, all should be actively engaged in developing the family's Safer Caring Plan to minimise the risk of allegations.

Foster carers are expected to share caregiving tasks. When designing your family’s Safer Caring Plan, you will need to consider several aspects, including: the way you dress, children playing, children’s bedrooms, your bedroom, internet safety, the names you use, language used, photos and videos and there are others in your plan.

These considerations are essential to creating a safe and nurturing environment for foster children and your own family. The Safer Caring Plan should be tailored to your specific family dynamics and circumstances.

## **Support and Supervision**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 21 - Supervision and Support of Foster Carers.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 7 - Develop yourself.

As a Foster Carer you will be challenged at various points during your career, but you will also gain the rewards, when you see a child in your care progress in a positive way. ‘Support and Supervision’ in foster care is crucial to ensure the well-being of foster children, as well as the effectiveness of foster carers in their roles. Here's an overview of the key supports you will be given as a Foster Carer:

**Supervising Social Worker:** After being approved as a foster carer, you will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker. Their primary role is to supervise and support you in fulfilling your responsibilities as a foster carer. They will provide guidance on working within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the policies, procedures, and guidelines of the fostering service. Your Supervising Social Worker will also work closely with the Child’s Social Worker.

**Mentors:** In Coventry we recognise that the role of a foster carer, whether mainstream or a Connected Persons carer, is complex and demanding. The aims of providing a peer mentor are therefore to:

* provide new foster carers with the support of an experienced foster carer – to offer a listening ear and empathy.
* increase the confidence of new foster carers and help them settle into their role.
* share first-hand experience of particular areas of fostering – such as fostering children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
* enable and encourage foster carers to develop their skills and confidence – which will help to sustain placements, thereby improving outcomes for children.
* improve the retention of foster carers.

**Induction Programme:** This consists of 6 monthly sessions for newly approved foster carers. It aims to offer advice and guidance on the areas that you will face as a new carer. It covers the following areas:

|  |
| --- |
| * Placement matching
 |
| * Working as part of a team
 |
| * Family time
 |
| * Therapeutic parenting
 |
| * Reflection and Supervision
 |
| * Recording and other paperwork
 |

**Support Sources:** Foster carers can seek support from various sources, including the child’s social worker, who holds responsibility for specific advice or support related to the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan. Foster carers are encouraged to increase their support network with other Foster Carers, CFCA and join the Foster Carers’ Support Groups.

**Regular Supervisions:** These are completed with your supervising social worker and will occur once a week for the first 4 weeks after approval, then fortnightly until 4 months after approval and then monthly. These may decrease in frequency if long-term matched. Supervision sessions are confidential, but the Supervising Social Worker may discuss relevant information with the child's social worker or other professionals involved in the child or family's care. Both foster carers and Supervising Social Workers are expected to maintain a framework of respect, honesty, and trust.

Supervision is a two-way process aimed at monitoring the development of foster carers, ensuring they meet the induction standards, and providing suitable homes for children/young people. The quality of supervision provided by supervising social workers is assessed by team managers through practice observations.

**Annual Unannounced Visit:** Foster carers can expect at least one unannounced visit per year from their Supervising Social Worker, primarily to assess the home environment where a child is living.

**Out-of-Hours Support:** Our out-of-hours support is offered to foster carers outside of regular office hours. The out-of-hours phone number is: 07958337681. This is operated by workers within the Fostering Service who will answer the phone to your emergency query and offer advice and support.

**Responsibilities:** Your Supervising Social Worker is responsible for various tasks, including supporting foster carers, addressing their concerns, and ensuring all necessary tasks are completed. They should not wait until supervision meetings or reviews to address any care-related concerns.

## **Child Care Support, Back Up Carers and Short stays**

Coventry Fostering Service believes that to make the lives of children in foster care as much like all other children as possible, the majority of the care that they receive should be provided by their foster carers and their network.

Foster carers are able to identify members of their support network who can act as child care support both in an emergency and on a planned basis and request that the service supports this by undertaking DBS checks for these child care supports. As a general rule, foster carers should not leave children unsupervised in the care of those who are not subject to these checks. The exceptions to this are regulated child care settings e.g. nurseries and child minders or sharing mutual child care support with other foster carers.

## **Delegated Authority**

To help foster carers make day to day decisions in a timely manner for children in their care, you will be empowered to use delegated authority where appropriate to do so.

The Delegation of Authority policy outlines how Delegated Authority to foster carers works in Coventry. The delegation of authority is based on the [Fostering Network Support Tool](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/delegated-authority) which provides a detailed record of arrangements to foster carers. Delegated Authority is discussed at the placement planning meeting and at every child’s review.

Children may propose spending time with their friendship network including sleepovers. Foster carers are able to agree to these types of arrangements on the basis of delegated authority provided they exercise similar caution to that they would with their own children e.g. checking with the parents of friends what the arrangements will be.

The delegation of authority to foster carers does not include the provision of child care support. However, in some circumstances family time with extended family members may be agreed as part of a connected persons arrangement.

[Please click here to view the Delegation of Authority policy](https://coventrychildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_del_auth_fc_resid.html)

## **Support network – back up carers**

Where a longer period of child care support or short stay is needed, foster carers will initially be asked if they can identify someone in their support network to act as a backup carer. Notice of 8 weeks is requested.

Where a backup carer is identified, the supervising social worker will ensure that the social workers for the children in placement are consulted. They will then meet with the backup carer to ensure they are equipped to undertake this role. This meeting will include viewing the proposed accommodation, sharing information about the fostering policies and discussing safer caring issues. DBS checks, Local authority checks, and a health and safety check will also be undertaken. The supervising social worker will ask for some information from the back up carer about their child care experience, relationship with the fostering household, other household members and health. If particular equipment is needed for the stay, arrangements will be made for this to be provided to the backup carer by the main carer. Once a particular short stay is planned with the backup carer, the child(ren)’s social worker will be consulted on the proposed arrangement. Following this, the backup carer will receive information about the child(ren), their needs and their routines.

Fostering fees and allowances will continue to be paid to the main carer during the short stay with the backup carer with the expectation that these are passed on to the backup carer. Arrangements for this will be agreed between the two.

If making a back up arrangement incurs expenses e.g. additional mileage this will be reimbursed to the main carer in the usual way.

## **Short Stays with another approved foster carer**

Notice of 8 weeks is requested.

Where it is not possible to identify a member of the foster carer’s network to provide a short stay, a short stay with another foster carer can be considered. Short stays can either be for a one-off period or planned on a more regular basis. The agreement to short stays will be based on the needs of the child and agreed as a measure to stabilise or maintain a placement. These agreements will be made at a stability meeting for the child. On agreement, the child’s social worker will be asked to complete a placement request form to identify a suitable carer. Foster Carers may have other carers in their network with whom the child has existing relationships. Where applicable, foster carers may suggest these foster carers as suitable to provide a short stay. However, any proposed short stay carer arrangement will need to be confirmed or identified through the placements and fostering services.

Where a short stay is provided by another foster carer, that carer will receive the payment for the nights the child spends with them. The main carer will have this money deducted from their payments.

## **Day time child care support**

Notice of 2 weeks is requested if is a planned event.

Foster carers may request support with child care from the service by way of arranging for another foster carer’s support to enable them to attend training or in the case of an emergency such as sickness or bereavement. It is expected that this will be an exception, as in most cases foster carers support network could assist with this. Payments for child care support are made only where this support is needed to support the request of the service i.e. meetings or training rather than for the day-to-day activities of the carer.

## **Financial Matters**

Foster carers receive fostering allowances made up of age-related child allowances and fees related to the foster carer's skill level. The allowances are paid in arrears, directly to the foster carer's bank or building society. Any queries about payments should be raised with the Supervising Social Worker.

**Additional Payments for Foster Carers**

**Holidays and Festivals:** Foster carers may receive additional allowances for holidays and festivals. Foster carers should discuss holiday plans with the Supervising Social Worker.

**Furniture and Equipment:** Foster carers are currently provided with furniture and equipment depending on their approval category. Carers are encouraged to identify with their Supervising Social Worker when any of the below items need replacing. This includes the following items:

* Bed and bedding
* Wardrobe
* Desk
* Chair
* Baby and toddler equipment including stair gate
* Car Seat
* Push chair/pram

**Identity Documents:** Funding applications for immigration, passports and birth certificates will be met by Children’s Social Work teams and the application process to secure immigration and travel documents should be secured within 4 weeks of child becoming looked after or as part of initial court processes whichever is sooner.

**Pocket Money:** The allowance already includes personal/pocket money, but there is no specified amount per week. It is determined based on individual circumstances and is discussed with the child and foster carer.

**Savings Scheme:** Every fostering allowance has £5 deducted from it for savings which are held centrally and passed to the young person when they leave care. Further information about this click on the link for Savings Policy for Children in Care: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/lacsavingspolicy>

**Travel Expenses:** Foster carers receive mileage expenses for various travelling to and from family time, health appointment, school, meetings and so on. Mileage can be claimed, but there are limits.

**For further information related to additional payments for foster carers**, please click on the following link: [file:///C:/Users/cvbob264/Downloads/Additional\_Payments\_for\_Foster\_Carers%20-%20draft%20amendments%20Feb%2023.pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/cvbob264/Downloads/Additional_Payments_for_Foster_Carers%20-%20draft%20amendments%20Feb%2023.pdf)

**Pathways to Care:** Foster carers can access financial support under certain conditions to either create additional bedroom space or purchase a larger vehicle to accommodate more children. Please click on the following link to access the Pathways to Care Policy. 

**Documentation and Tax Exemption:** Foster carers are responsible for their own income tax and national insurance contributions. Foster carers receive a fixed tax exemption up to a certain amount, and additional tax relief for each week a child is in their care.

**Qualifying Years for Pension:** Foster carers can build up qualifying years for the basic state pension and additional state pension through insurance credits.

**Keep a record:** Foster carers should keep records of how allowances are spent on children and keep a clear record of money given to children.

**Insurance:** Foster carers must inform their home, building, and contents insurance, and car insurance companies of their foster care status. Written confirmation is necessary. The Fostering service will consider reimbursement to carers of any loss/damage resulting from their role. This will only be considered if existing insurance does not cover this.

These points highlight the various aspects of support and supervision, financial matters, and documentation related to foster care. Foster carers should have a clear understanding of these aspects to provide a safe and supportive environment for the children in their care.

## **Role of your Supervising Social Worker**

**After Approval**

* Ensure you complete the induction programme and that your support, development and training needs are assessed and met so that you meet the standards and achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards certificate of completion by your first annual review.
* Give you 2 copies of the [Foster Care Agreement](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/coventry/fc_agreement.html); one to be signed and kept safe and one signed, returned and placed on your file.
* Support you with any specialist issues for disabled children for e.g. support in completing applications.

### **Before a Child comes to stay with you:**

* Ensure that you have pre-placement information which describes the child, their needs and any risks they may present in placement. Ensure that the child's social worker gives you full information about children, including a history of their experiences of trauma and abuse or suspected abuse and the reason for the placement.
* Complete risk assessments where necessary including in relation to surrounding bedroom sharing (each child over 3 has their own bedroom or, where this is not possible, the sharing of the bedroom has been agreed by the child’s social worker), mixing with other children in the home, etc.
* Discuss and check equipment (especially in the child’s bedroom) and ensure it is appropriate to the age of the child to be placed.
* Discuss potential children and planning meetings.
* Discuss family time with birth parents and family members.
* Look at how the child’s health needs are promoted and how children should be encouraged to follow a healthy lifestyle.
* Help you to work with services such as health and education.
* Help you with training needs for safer caring practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused or training on issues affecting disabled children.
* Discuss financial issues with you: allowances, pocket money, leisure activities, toiletries and travelling and the importance of your insurance policy (please see also the leaflet entitled "Additional Allowances for Coventry Foster Carers").
* Find out about holiday plans you have made, and whether the child is going with you? If not, the child’s social worker must be informed so other arrangements can be made.
* Ensure that fostered children have a passport
* Exchange contact numbers with all relevant members of the family, including out of hours support.
* Ensure that arrangements are made for the provision of specialist equipment for disabled children.
* Set a date for a first visit after a child is placed with you.

### **During the Child’s stay with you:**

* Check and follow up on all issues raised during the placement planning meeting. Discuss any concerns with you and ensure appropriate support is provided straight away rather than waiting for reviews.
* Provide you with breaks from caring as needed, which must meet the needs of the children.
* Support you in liaising with the child’s social worker and escalate any issues which need to be followed up, by using Coventry’s escalation policy.
* Ensure you receive invitations to a child’s [Looked After Reviews](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/looked_aft_review.html) and [Child Protection Conferences](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/child_prot_conf.html), and attend when appropriate.
* Prepare for and attend your Review meetings.
* Ensure the training programme is updated and accessed by you and your family and children.
* Visit regularly.
* Make unannounced visits at least once per year.
* Update [Disclosure and Barring Service](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/dis_barring_service.html) checks on members of your family every three years, including those reaching 18, and other persons who come to live at the home, who are 18 or over.
* Update medicals on you every 2 years or as necessary.
* Record all communication with you.
* Provide reports for panel as required under the relevant procedures.
* Where appropriate contribute to Court Reports as agreed with child’s social worker.
* Discuss how you can support young people into adulthood.
* Support in any [Strategy Meetings](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/strategy_meeting.html) and [Section 47 Enquiry](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/sec_47_enq.html) relating to your foster family. Be involved in interviews/support as agreed if allegations are made.

## **When a Child leaves your Home**

Typically, when a child or young person comes to live with you, this may end under various circumstances. In such cases, a plan should be developed to ensure a smooth transition for the child. This plan should address the child's concerns and anxieties about the future.

* This can be a difficult time for your family and support is offered.
* We will discuss with you and your family all the issues that have led to any unplanned ending of a placement and identify any learning opportunities.
* Support you to complete an end of placement report.
* Attend Disruption Meetings as required.
* Ensure that all documentation in relation to the child who has moved on has been collected from you by your Supervising Social Worker.
* Make sure "goodbyes" happen, for the child's friends and family members they are close to. Please refer to the Fostering Networks ‘Keep Connected’ campaign for further information about maintaining children’s most important relationships:

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/our-campaigns/keep-connected>

If your Supervising Social Worker has any concerns about your care or feels you need extra support, they will not wait until supervision meetings or reviews but deal with any issues as they arise.

## **Children of Fostering Families**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 21 -Supervision and Support of Foster Carers.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.
* Standard 7 - Develop yourself.

Supporting the well-being of foster carers' own children is a crucial aspect of fostering.

Foster carers' own children often play a significant role in the fostering process. They may welcome new foster children into the home and help them settle in. However, sharing their home and parents with another child can be challenging, and it's essential to provide support to these children.

**Developing a Safer Caring Plan:** Depending on their age, foster carers' children should be involved in developing the Safer Caring Plan. This plan helps establish clear boundaries for everyday life, ensuring that everyone feels safe. It is essential for the smooth functioning of a fostering family.

**Importance of Support:** When foster carers' own children do not receive the support they need, it can lead to disruption and breakdowns in the placement, which can be disturbing and upsetting for foster children. Providing the necessary support to foster carers' children is vital for the overall success of fostering. Supervising Social Workers and our Children and Family Workers can provide support to foster carers’ children. The support on offer can vary based on the need. In addition, the service likes to celebrate the involvement of foster carer’s children with key events which brings them together to have fun and make links with other children who have similar experiences.

**Interactions and Relationships:** Interactions between foster carers' children and fostered children may involve disagreements at times but can also result in fun, friendships and create positive family memories. Nurturing these relationships is important.

**Discussing Fostering with Your Children:** It is crucial to discuss the impact of fostering on your family with your own children. Your Supervising Social Worker can be a resource for answering any questions or concerns your children may have. This helps them feel more comfortable and engaged with the fostering service.

**Balancing Time:** Foster carers should allocate dedicated time for their own children. A family planner can be useful for agreeing on times, dates, and activities with both their own children and fostered children. This balance helps ensure that all children in the family receive the attention they need.

**Recognising Problems Early:** Foster carers should be vigilant for early signs of problems or conflicts involving their own children and fostered children. Open communication and addressing issues promptly are essential.

**Consultation:** Foster carers can seek advice and guidance from other experienced foster carers when facing challenges involving their own children in the fostering family and can access support from a mentor. Coventry Fostering Service has a Mentor Scheme which offers one to one peer support and advice from an experienced Coventry foster carer.

## **Escalation Policy**

This policy is intended to address day to day care planning issues and does not supersede existing arrangements in place in relation to issues of safeguarding. Your Supervising Social Worker will help support you with escalation. There are 4 stages involved, these are as follows:

**Stage 1**

Should any member of the Team have issues to raise it is expected that in the first instance they would discuss this with their own Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker should record this discussion and the agreement made as to how it will be addressed. This will usually be by the Supervising Social Worker supporting the foster carer through discussions with another team member.

Resolution at this stage should be achieved within 3 working days.

**Stage 2**

Should this not resolve the issue, the Supervising Social Worker will discuss the issue with their line manager. The line manager will make contact with the relevant team member’s manager to address the issue.

Resolution at this stage should be achieved with 3 working days.

**Stage 3**

In all instances where concerns have not been resolved between Team Managers, the Supervising Social Worker should ask that the team manager to escalate to the relevant Service Manager. The service manager will contact the team member’s equivalent manager to resolve the issue. Team manager Supervising Social Worker will be copied into correspondence.

Resolution at this stage should be achieved within 2 working days.

**Stage 4**

If there is no resolution following stage 3, the Supervising Social Worker should contact the service manager to advise that the issue has not been resolved. The Team Manager should be copied into this correspondence. If there remains no resolution, the service manager should consider escalating the issue to the relevant Strategic Lead.

**Annual reviews and appeals for foster carers:**

1. **Annual Review:** After being approved as a foster carer, your approval will be reviewed at least once a year. The review is conducted to assess whether you will continue to be approved as a foster carer and if any changes are needed in your terms of approval. The Supervising Social Worker plays a central role in this process and visits you to compile an annual review report.
2. **Review Report:** The review report is shared with foster carers, and they are encouraged to add their views and sign it. If foster carers have concerns or disagreements with any aspects of the report, they should discuss these with their Supervising Social Worker. Where an agreement cannot be reached, this should be discussed with the fostering team manager. Approval terms cannot be altered without the consent of the foster carer or via the fostering panel process. Foster Carers will also be asked to complete a separate document for their views and feedback over the past year, as part of their review, on differing aspects of their fostering journey, including their Supervising Social Worker and the Child’s Social Worker.
3. **Unannounced Visit:** Foster carers can expect at least one unannounced visit each year as part of the review process. There is a One Minute Guide on unannounced visits, so please refer to the section on OMG’s for further information.
4. **Disclosure and Barring Service:** Foster carers and adult members of their family who are household members are subject to a Disclosure and Barring Service check every three years.
5. **Review Panel:** In certain situations, such as significant changes to your approval, the review report will be presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation.
6. **Agency Decision Maker:** The Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision on your approval, taking into account the Panel's recommendations.
7. **Appealing Decisions:** If you disagree with a decision to terminate your approval or revise your terms, you can challenge it in writing within 28 calendar days. You may also apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of the qualifying determination (QD) letter.
8. **IRM Review:** The IRM reviews challenges to foster care decisions and may recommend changes. The views of the IRM are fed back to the Fostering Agency Decision Maker to reconsider their decision.
9. **Final Decision:** The final decision will be communicated to foster carers as soon as possible and will confirm the outcome, which may include maintaining or changing approval.

This information provides a comprehensive overview of how foster carers' children are supported, as well as the review and appeal process for foster carers' approval. It underscores the importance of maintaining a supportive and well-balanced family environment for fostering success.

## **Training and Development**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 20 - Learning and development of foster carers.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 7 - Develop yourself.

Training and development play a crucial role in fostering, ensuring that foster carers are well-equipped to provide the best possible care for children and young people in their care. Here are the key points related to training and development for foster carers:

**Continual Learning:** As a foster carer, you will have already completed some pre-approval training and induction. However, it is essential to continue building on this training to enhance your skills and confidence in dealing with the various situations you may face.

**Ongoing Support:** Throughout your fostering career, you will receive ongoing support and development opportunities. This helps create a positive experience for both you and the children or young people you care for. Your personal development plan completed in assessment and updated at each foster carer review will outline how you will be supported in your training and development.

**Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) Workbook:** New foster carers must complete a workbook that demonstrates their ability to meet the Training, Support, and Development Standards for Foster Care. The completion of this workbook is typically required within specific timeframes following approval, 12 months for mainstream Foster Carers and 18 months for Connected Persons Foster Carers.

**Core Training:** In accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards, all foster carers (both where a fostering household is a couple) must receive training in certain areas as a minimum and all core training must be completed within your first 12 months after initial approval and be refreshed every 3 years. These are:

* 1. [**Safeguarding Awareness for Foster Care**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/57199/safeguarding-awareness-for-foster-care)
	2. [**Intro to Safer Caring & Health & Safety**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/57195/intro-to-safer-caring-health-safety)
	3. [**Recording for Foster Carers**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/57198/recording-for-foster-carers)
	4. [**Equality & Diversity**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/learning-development-foster-carers/learning-development-foster-carers-1/7)
	5. [**First Aid for Foster Carers**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/57192/first-aid-for-foster-carers)
	6. [**Therapeutic Parenting and Behaviour Management**](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/57202/therapeutic-parenting-and-behaviour-management-)
	7. **Supporting Education of Children in Care**

**Individualised Training:** Training can be personalised to cater to each foster carer's needs. It is based on the main areas of the foster carers role, encompassing what you should know, understand, and be able to do.

**Training Availability:** Training sessions are held during the day, evenings, or weekends at convenient locations. Training is offered both online and face to face.

**Equality and Anti-Discrimination:** Coventry Fostering Service is committed to providing training and support based on principles of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that foster carers receive training that is inclusive and fair.

**Varied Training Formats:** Training can take various forms, including attending courses face to face, utilising online resources or courses, reading books, listening to podcasts or participating in workshops. Your Supervising Social Worker will provide you with a training program and help you access the training opportunities that suit your needs and preferences.

**Transfer of Training Portfolio:** In case you move to another Fostering Service, your training portfolio can be transferred upon request, allowing you to continue your development as a foster carer.

In summary, training and development are ongoing processes for foster carers, aimed at enhancing their knowledge and skills, addressing the unique challenges of fostering, and ensuring the well-being of children and young people in their care. Foster carers are encouraged to actively engage in training opportunities and work closely with their Supervising Social Worker to meet their training needs.

## **Recording**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 26 - Records.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

Recording is a vital aspect of foster care, ensuring that comprehensive information is maintained about the children and young people in your care. Here are the key points regarding recording in your role as foster carers:

1. **Importance of Records:** A child's records are essential sources of information. They provide insight into the events that led to Children's Social Care's involvement in their life, including the reasons behind decisions related to their care. Foster carer recording adds to this picture as it enables children and those working with them to understand what happened in their time with you. These records help children understand their past and can be valuable in later life when they want to learn more about their childhood.
2. **Professional Responsibility:** As a foster carer, it is crucial that you contribute to these records. Maintaining records of events for all children and young people placed with you is essential. These records contribute to making plans for the child or young person's future and ensure that situations are clearly understood.
3. **Timely and Detailed Recording:** It is advisable to record events as they happen. Notes should include the date, time, individuals present, and the specifics of what was said. These records should be concise and to the point. These should be either sent to your supervising social worker on a weekly basis by email or provided to your social worker in paper copy at each visit. Once the child moves on, all records related to the child should be returned to the supervising social worker.
4. **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Children and young people should able to see what you write about them. If there is information considered too private for the young person to see, consult with your Supervising Social Worker to determine how to maintain the information privately.
5. **Open and Honest Communication:** At the Placement Planning meeting, it should be made clear to parents and young people what you will be recording, how it will be used, and how long the records will be kept. This creates an open and honest relationship, with records accurately reflecting what transpires.
6. **Views of the Child:** You should ask the child about their views, wishes, and feelings, ensuring their voice is heard when planning care and support. If there are situations where their wishes cannot be fulfilled, this should be explained to the child.
7. **Secure Storage:** All information you hold regarding a young person should be securely stored, ideally in the lockable box provided by your Supervising Social Worker.
8. **Confidentiality:** Records, whether paper or electronic, should be securely kept, and electronic communication should be handled in a secure and professional manner. Avoid including identifying information in emails and use passwords when sending confidential documents electronically.
9. **Sharing Information:** Sharing information with close family members and your own children may be necessary depending on their age and understanding. When unsure about the extent of information to share, consult the child's or your supervising social worker. For sharing information with professionals, request to see their identification card before visits and before sharing any information.
10. **Retaining Records:** Your records, including information from supervision meetings, allegations, and training and development records, will be retained by the fostering service for at least ten years after your approval was terminated.

In summary, accurate and confidential record-keeping is a fundamental responsibility for foster carers. It supports child care, safety, and the ability to make well-informed decisions. Moreover, open and honest communication about record-keeping fosters trust and transparency in relationships with the children in your care and their families.

## **Significant Events and Notifications**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 29 - Notifications of Significant Events.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Schedule 7 - Events and Notifications.

If you become aware of a significant event taking place, within your household or concerning a child in your care, firstly you need to ensure the child is safe, then you must discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker, even if you are not sure if it constitutes a significant event.

A significant event could be any of the following:

* The death of a child;
* A serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with you;
* The outbreak in your foster home of any infectious disease (which in the opinion of a general practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be notified);
* An allegation that a child placed with you has committed a serious offence;
* Any concerns that a child placed with you is being sexually exploited;
* The Police have been called to your home as a result of a serious incident relating to a child placed there;
* A child placed with you has gone missing;
* Any serious concerns about the emotional or mental health of a child placed with you, such that a mental health assessment would be requested under the Mental Health Act 1983.

If the incident or event does not fall in the category of ‘significant event’, you still must ensure you inform your Supervising Social Worker, or another member of the Fostering Service so they can provide advice/ guidance on any next steps; for example:

* Assault by a foster child on you or a member of your household.
* Serious accident or injury to you whilst carrying out your duties.
* Any event which may result in media interest.
* Conduct of any foster carer, not directly connected with your household role, which may raise questions about their suitability as a foster carer.

All foster carers have a responsibility to report any concerns / incidents to their Supervising Social Worker or duty worker who will inform the fostering service manager. There should be no delay in reporting any concerns or incidents.

## **Working with Others**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 9 - Promoting and supporting contact.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

As a foster carer, you play a crucial role in the lives of the children and families you work with. Coventry Family Valued is the way we approach working with families, with a focus on the importance of relationships and connections in creating meaningful and sustainable change for children, young people, and their families.

Here's an overview of the information provided regarding your responsibilities and interactions with others involved in the child in your care, professionals and agencies in foster care:

**Open and Honest Relationships**

You should develop open and honest relationships with parents to ensure they understand that the child's well-being is a priority. Even if parents have faced challenges, it is important to work sensitively with them and never speak negatively about parents.

**Working with Professionals**

You will work with a range of professionals, including your Supervising Social Worker, which should be a two-way relationship of respect and professionalism, to form a team around the child to meet their needs and ensure their safety.

**Social Workers**

Every child or young person placed in foster care will have a social worker from various teams, such as the area teams, Through Care, Looked After Children and Permanency Team and the Children's Disability Team. These social workers are responsible for different aspects of child care.

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

Each child or young person placed in foster care will have an IRO. The IRO's role includes chairing Looked After Reviews and monitoring a child's case, offering support and assistance when necessary.

**Guardian ad Litem**

A Guardian ad litem is appointed by the court to provide an independent view of what has been happening and what should happen in the child's life. Foster carers should support children in sharing their views, particularly about their future, and help them spend time with the Guardian ad litem when necessary.

**Independent Visitor**

When it is in the child's best interests, the Local Authority must appoint an Independent Visitor who maintains regular contact with the child, offering advice and assistance.

**Advocates**

Advocates are appointed to speak on behalf of a child and support them. Children in care should be provided with information on how to access an Advocate.

**Children and Family Support Workers**

Children and Family Workers are based within the Fostering Service. The primary role of a Children and Family Worker is to promote stability for children. However, they are involved in all aspects of the service including facilitating training and support groups. They will work creatively with foster carers, the children of foster carers or children in care with an aim to improve outcomes or increase stability.

The support is intended to be short and intensive in nature, working alongside foster carers, supervising social workers, children’s social workers or other professionals involved.

**Foster Carer Mentors**

Coventry has a mentoring scheme for newly approved foster carers and you can be paired with a mentor after your approval or when you feel this additional peer guidance would benefit you.

The Fostering Network describes mentoring as:

“Approved or retired foster carers in a structured one-to-one relationship with other approved or prospective foster carers. Peer mentoring is delivered by a more experienced foster carers (the mentor) to a less experienced foster carer (the mentee), outside of any line management relationship. Mentors offer non-judgemental support from a position of understanding as foster carers themselves.”

Mentoring is semi-structured guidance where the mentor shares their knowledge, skills and experience to help the mentee to change something and develop their potential. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises - within agreed bounds.

Mentoring is more than ‘giving advice’, or passing on what your experience was in a particular area or situation. It's about motivating and empowering the mentee to identify their own issues and goals and helping them to find ways of resolving or reaching them - not by doing it for them or expecting them to ‘do it the way I did it’, but by understanding and respecting different ways of working. A mentor helps a mentee to believe in their own capabilities, boost confidence and self-esteem – helping them to find answers to problems.

**Edge of Care Services**

Edge of Care offer support for foster carers, their family and foster child when things may feel difficult. They have a Foster Placement Stability Therapeutic practitioner. Their focus is to support children and young people (8-17 years old) in foster care at risk of a placement disruption. To prevent children in care experiencing repeated foster home breakdowns. They aim to strengthen family relationships, build resilience, empower families with skills to find solutions in the future. They offer 12-week intensive support, using therapeutic and complementary approaches. They offer a whole family approach when experiencing crisis and when problems escalate.

For further details about Edge of Care Services please speak to your Supervising Social Worker and they can inform you and support you if a referral is needed.

**RISE**

RISE is Coventry’s children and young people’s mental health service (formerly known as CAMHS). It is a family of NHS-led services which aim to build resilience and empower children and young people. They run monthly drop-in sessions for foster carers, a 10-week training course for foster carers and offer therapeutic intervention for children and young people. Ask your Supervising Social Worker for more information about the drop-in sessions. If you think your fostered child would benefit from therapeutic intervention, please speak to your Supervising Social Worker about making a referral.

**Designated Nurse for Children in Care**

Foster carers work with the designated nurse for children in care and other health professionals to ensure the health needs of children in care are met.

**Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**

Foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty Team outside of normal office hours for urgent concerns, though it is important to contact the police first in cases of immediate danger.

**Out of Hours On-Call Fostering Support Service**

This service offers support and advice for urgent, and emergency matters outside of regular working hours. The on-call service is provided by members of the service with fostering experience. The number to call for Out of Hours support is: 07958337681.

**Adoption Central England (ACE)**

Where plans are made for a child to be adopted, the Regional Adoption Agency (ACE) will be involved to work with you, the child’s social worker and your supervising social worker to make transition plans. Foster carers play an essential role in supporting the child during the transition to adoption.

It is important to note that your interactions and collaboration with these professionals and agencies are essential for the well-being of the children in your care. Your Supervising Social Worker will guide you through this process and provide support as needed. Foster carers may also work with other agencies and individuals as the situation requires, with guidance and support from their Supervising Social Worker.

**Working with Children’s Social Workers**

When working with a child's social worker as a foster carer, you can expect certain responsibilities and interactions. Here's what to expect from the child's social worker:

**Placement Planning Meetings:**

* Placement Planning Meetings should be convened to identify and place a child. The first Placement Planning Meeting should ideally occur before the foster child moves in. This meeting helps develop the Placement Plan and identifies the child's needs and any necessary support to promote fostering stability. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to write up the Placement Plan.

**Communication Frequency:**

* The frequency and type of contact between the child's social worker and foster carer will vary based on the child's needs.

**Handling Requests:**

* Child's social workers are responsible for processing requests from foster carers, such as holiday forms and medical consents, within 10 working days or sooner if there is urgency, e.g., for medical appointments.

**Statutory Visits:**

* Statutory visits must include visits to the foster home, seeing the child alone, and inspecting the child's bedroom. Social workers are encouraged to spend one-on-one time with children periodically to build strong working relationships. The first visit should occur within one week of placement, with subsequent visits at a minimum of six-week intervals. In cases where the placement is considered permanent, visits can occur at intervals of three or six months in the second and subsequent years, as agreed upon during the Looked After Children review. For same visiting pattern applies to children living with Connected Persons carers. Again, please refer to the Escalation Policy.

**Pre-Meeting Reports (PMR):**

* Pre-Meeting Reports (PMR) should be completed five days before each Looked after review. The PMR should be shared with the child, parent, and carer before each review to ensure that everyone involved is aware of the proposed care plan.

**Stability Meetings:**

* Stability Meetings are used for the most vulnerable children, and the need and frequency are determined on a case-by-case basis. The first meeting should take place when difficulties with stability emerge with reviews held where appropriate or needed. The meetings are to address specific needs, review interventions, and promote foster home stability. They can be arranged at the start of child moving in, if there is an identified need to provide a high level of support for its success.

These expectations are in place to ensure that children in foster care receive the support, care, and monitoring they need for their well-being and development. Foster carers can collaborate with the child's social worker to provide a stable and nurturing environment for the children in their care.

## **Worried the relationship with your foster child is coming to an end**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

Children and young people moving unexpectedly often leaves everyone involved feeling uneasy. Your Supervising Social Worker will assist in supporting you and the child throughout this process.

Whenever you encounter challenges, use your support networks to find solutions. Ensure Stability meetings have been conducted as needed to stabilise the placement.

Disruption refers to a placement ending prematurely, either due to Children’s Social Care determining it no longer suits the child's needs, or because you feel unable to continue caring for the child, or the child expresses a desire to leave.

Regardless of the reason for the disruption, it is crucial to make the transition as positive as possible. Helping the child move on is a fundamental responsibility, and both you and your family should prepare and provide support to minimise the emotional impact.

A Disruption Meeting may be organised by the child's social worker. The meeting chair ensures a review of the circumstances leading to the disruption, allowing everyone to voice their perspectives and find solutions. Minutes of the meeting should be shared with all involved parties. The Disruption Meeting report may also be presented to the fostering panel. A Looked After Review should be arranged, and there may be a need to review your approval terms.

## **Safeguarding**

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Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.
* Regulation 12 - Arrangements for the protection of children.

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

* Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children.

This section explains the procedure to be followed where there are concerns that a child placed with you has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

You should have been made aware of these procedures for responding to concerns about the safety of a child, and these procedures must be followed in all cases. You should have up to date training in place around how to prevent, recognise and respond to allegation of abuse and neglect.

## **Allegations**

When an allegation is made against you or a member of your family as a foster carer, it is essential to follow established procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and address the allegation properly.

Allegations and their proper handling are essential for ensuring the safety of the child and maintaining the integrity of the foster care system. Foster carers must follow established procedures, and investigations are carried out with sensitivity and fairness to all parties involved.

Please see The Fostering Network’s allegations information for further details: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/allegations>

## Top of Form**How to make Complaints about the Fostering Service**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

Complaints and concerns by and for children in foster care are taken seriously and have established procedures for resolution. Here's what to expect regarding complaints in foster care:

**For Complaints on Behalf of Children:** If you are helping a child in your care complain or want to complain on their behalf, you should follow the specific Complaints by and for Children Procedure through this link: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/childrens-social-care/young-peoples-guide-making-social-care-complaint/3#:~:text=phone%20Customer%20Services%20on%2008085,them%20on%3A%200800%200272%20118>.

**Seek Help and Guidance:** If you are a child in foster care and have a concern or want to make a complaint, you can seek help from various individuals, including your foster carer, social worker, or the Looked After independent Reviewing Officer. They can assist you in making a complaint.

**No Negative Consequences:** It is essential to understand that you will not get into trouble for making a complaint. Complaining is your right, and there should be no negative consequences for expressing your concerns.

**Investigation Independence:** The person who the complaint is about will not be involved in the investigation of the complaint. This ensures that the process is fair and impartial.

**Communication and Explanation:** You should receive clear communication about how the complaint will be handled and what to expect during the process. Any actions taken as a result of the complaint should also be explained to you.

**Your Right to Complain:** Always remember that it is your right to complain if you are not happy about anything. You have the right to voice your concerns and seek resolution.

**Complaint vs. Allegation:** Your foster carer or social worker will guide you on differentiating between a complaint and an allegation or safeguarding matter. Complaints generally relate to service or treatment issues and are resolved through different procedures.

**Making a Complaint About the Fostering Service as a foster carer:** If you want to make a complaint about the fostering service, specific procedures should be followed.

1. **Working together:** it is hoped that most issues about your work with Coventry Children’s Services can be resolved informally through discussion within or between the fostering service and other parts of the service. If you have a difficulty please contact your supervising social worker, their team manager or the Fostering Operational Lead to try to identify an informal resolution.
2. **Formal Complaints (Stage 1):** You have a right to make a formal complaint about the fostering service or another part of children’s services. If you would like to do this or are not satisfied by an informal resolution, the complaint can be submitted for local resolution. It will be handled by the Manager responsible for the services provided. You will receive a response, including details of how the complaint will be resolved.
3. **Investigation (Stage 2):** If the complaint remains unresolved after Stage 1 and you are still unhappy, you can request further investigation. The investigation will be conducted by an independent person not associated with the service. They will produce a report with their findings and recommendations for resolving the complaint.
4. **Review Panels (Stage 3):** In some cases, if the complaint is not resolved even after the investigation (Stage 2), you have the option to take it to a Review Panel. This panel is composed of individuals independent of the Fostering Service and the local authority. They make decisions regarding the complaint and may provide additional recommendations. An Operational Lead Manager will respond to the Review Panel's decision and recommendations.
5. **Protection from Reprisal:** You will not face any reprisals or negative consequences for making a complaint or representation.
6. **Clear Response:** Complaints will be treated seriously, and the fostering service should respond to them clearly and fairly. They should explain the process involved, including the timeframes.
7. **Outcome Explanation:** You should receive a copy of the outcome of the complaint, along with any actions or practice changes that will be implemented as a result. The fostering service should provide a clear outcome to the investigation.
8. **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:** If you are not satisfied with the resolution at the local authority level, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on 0300 061 0614 to talk to a complaints advisor about registering a new complaint or you can write to them, which may take longer, to: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH.
9. **Fostering Services with Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies:** If you have ongoing concerns about the service provided by either a local authority or an Independent Fostering Agency, you can contact Ofsted, the regulatory authority for fostering services at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or call on 0300 123 1231.

However, it is important to note that Ofsted will not consider any complaints until the internal complaints process has been fully completed.

**Children's Commissioner for England:** If you need further assistance or support, you can also contact the Children's Commissioner for England. They provide help and guidance, and you can reach out to them for confidential support.

Complaints procedures are in place to ensure that issues are addressed and resolved in a fair and transparent manner, and everyone involved should be aware of these processes and their rights.

**For Making a Whistleblowing Complaint:** Whistleblowing is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of the standard complaints’ procedure. If you encounter serious concerns or wrongdoing, you can report them using the following steps:

* **Inform Your Supervising Social Worker:** If you have serious concerns or come across any wrongdoing.
* **Reporting Concerns About Your Supervising Social Worker:** If your concern involves your supervising social worker, speak to their manager within the Fostering Service.
* **Record Concerns:** Record your concerns, including names, dates, places, and reasons. If you cannot do this yourself, the staff member you speak to will make a written record of their conversation.
* **Contacts for Advice:** You can seek advice from support organisations before making a disclosure.
* **No Reprisal:** The fostering service should not tolerate harassment, bullying, or victimisation of whistle blowers. You should be able to raise concerns confidentially or openly without fear of reprisal.
* **External Disclosures:** If you feel that your concern has not been satisfactorily addressed within the fostering service, you can make a disclosure to a prescribed external body. Contact details for various organisations are provided for such disclosures.Top of Form

## **Children that are Missing**

Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.
* Regulation 13 - Behaviour management and children missing from foster parent's home.

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

* Standard 5 - Children Missing From Care.

Relevant Guidance

[Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care (DfE)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf)

The information you provided details the procedures and guidelines for dealing with missing children, particularly those in foster care. The key points and actions are as follows:

1. **Definitions of 'Missing' and 'Missing from care':**
	* **Missing:** Any child/young person under the age of 18 and whose whereabouts cannot be established and not at a place where they are expected or required to be.
	* **Missing from care:** A looked after child / young person who has been reported missing to the police because they are not at their placement or place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts are unknown.
2. **Placement Plan:** All children in foster care must have a Placement Plan that considers the risk of the child going missing and includes measures to prevent or reduce such risks.
3. **Preventing Running Away:** Foster carers should create a secure and supportive environment to minimise the likelihood of children going missing. They should educate children about the risks, help them identify triggers, and provide alternatives when needed.
4. **When a Child Wants to Leave:** Foster carers should not physically restrain a child from leaving.
5. **Signs of Running Away:** Carers should be alert to signs that a child may run away and take agreed actions to reduce or prevent it, including contacting their supervising social worker.
6. **Increased Risk:** If the risk of a child running away becomes serious, carers should contact the supervising social worker or, if it's outside office hours, fostering on call.
7. **Child Protection Concerns:** For child protection concerns or if the child has gone missing, the Placement Plan should include information about daily safety arrangements.
8. **Risk Factors:** The planning process should consider specific risk factors for each child, such as trafficking, grooming, risk of radicalisation, sexual exploitation, or involvement in offending behaviour.
9. **Contacting Authorities:** If a child is missing, foster carers should contact the supervising social worker or fostering manager, unless there is an immediate serious risk, in which case, they should contact the police first.
10. **Classifying 'Missing' or ‘Missing from care’:** Foster carers should not make the classification themselves; the police will determine if a child is 'Missing' or ‘Missing from Care’ based on the information provided.
11. **Immediate Response:** For high-risk missing children, immediate deployment of police resources is required. For medium-risk cases, there should be a proactive investigation and search to locate the child as soon as possible.
12. **Police Powers:** The police have powers under the Children Act 1989 to remove a child into police protection for up to 72 hours.
13. **Information Sharing:** Effective sharing of information among professionals and agencies is essential to identify risky behaviour patterns.
14. **Initial Checks:** When the whereabouts of a child are unknown, initial checks should be carried out to locate them. Preliminary checks should have a reasonable timeframe based on an assessment of the risks related to the individual child. Foster carers are not expected to put themselves at risk or to disrupt overnight care for other children in the household to undertake these checks.
15. **Return Home Interviews:** A Coventry City Council professional conducts an in-depth interview with the child within 72 hours of their return, focusing on their safety, reasons for running away, and follow-up actions.
16. **Follow-up Actions:** Agencies work together to assess the child, develop safety plans, and provide necessary support.
17. **Repeat Running Away:** If a child continually runs away, alternative strategies should be considered to prevent further incidents and provide support. Multi Agency Strategy meetings should take place where a child has been missing for 72 hours to review the risks and draw a plan of action and for repeat episodes of children going missing.

These guidelines aim to ensure the safety and well-being of children in foster care, especially when they go missing or run away. Foster carers play a critical role in providing a secure environment and supporting children to reduce the risks of running away.**Top of Form**

## **Internet, Photographs and Mobile phones**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 4 - Safeguarding children.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively.
* Standard 6 – Keep children and young people safe from harm.

See also:

* [Think U Know](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/) - Online safety information.
* [Childnet](https://www.childnet.com/young-people) - latest information on the sites and services that children and young people use, plus information about mobiles, gaming, downloading, social networking and much more.
* [Child Safety Online](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/490001/Social_Media_Guidance_UKCCIS_Final_18122015.pdf.pdf): A practical guide for parents and carers whose children are using social media.
* [NSPCC - Parental Controls](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/)
* [NSPCC Report Remove Tool](https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/remove-nude-image-shared-online/) - The tool enables young people under the age of 18 to report a nude image or video of themselves which has appeared online. The Internet Watch Foundation will review these reports and work to remove any content which breaks the law.
* [UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Digital Passport](https://www.internetmatters.org/ukcis-vulnerable-working-group/ukcis-digital-passport/) – a communication tool to support children and young people with care experience to talk with their carers about their online lives.
* [Talking to Your Child About Online Sexual Harassment (Children's Commissioner)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/talking-to-your-child-about-online-sexual-harassment-a-guide-for-parents/).

The information you provided addresses the importance of understanding and managing the use of the internet, photographs, and mobile phones, particularly for children and young people in foster care. Here are the key points and guidelines from the text:

1. **Background Check:** When a child is placed in foster care, it is essential to learn about their background and whether the internet, photographs, or mobile phones have contributed to any abuse in the past. This knowledge helps in planning the safe use of these technologies for all children, especially if they have been affected by it previously.
2. **Understanding Media:** Foster carers should develop an understanding of various electronic devices, the internet, and social media. This understanding should include knowledge of how to safeguard children when they use the internet and mobile devices. You can find out more about accessing course to support you on this through the [Adult Education Offer](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/adulted)
3. **Grooming Awareness:** Foster carers should be alert to signs of grooming behaviour, which involves someone building an emotional connection with a child to exploit them sexually or for criminal gain.
4. **Bullying Concerns:** If you suspect a child is being bullied over the internet or phone, discuss the issue with the child, document it in the daily record, and inform the child's social worker promptly.
5. **Safe Web Browsing:** Foster carers should engage in a child's web browsing, especially when a new child is placed in their care. It is an opportunity to teach children about both the positive and negative aspects of the web. If the child is unsure about a site, they should be encouraged to talk to the carer.
6. **Use of Adult Sites:** Children should not be allowed to use sites designed for adults unless a risk assessment has been conducted in consultation with the social worker, with the details included in the child's Placement Plan.
7. **Teaching Safe Behaviour:** Children should be taught to be cautious, especially when using social networking sites. They should avoid sharing information that could expose their identity or whereabouts.
8. **Understanding Site Terms and Conditions:** Foster carers should guide children through the terms and conditions of the sites they use and ensure that both the carer and child understand them.
9. **Deciding Who to Trust:** Equip children with the skills to decide whom to trust, even in online relationships. Foster carers should be alert to signs of grooming behaviour and possible sexual exploitation.
10. **Social Networking Sites:** Foster carers should be aware that social networking sites are used by perpetrators to access children for sexual abuse. Legislation, such as the Serious Crime Act (2015), introduced offenses related to sexual communication with a child.
11. **Radicalisation and Extremism:** Foster carers should be vigilant about extremist groups that use social networking to attract children and young people into radical ideologies. These ideologies can be intolerant of diversity.
12. **Internet Abuse:** The text mentions four main areas of internet abuse to children, including online bullying, exploitation, extremism, and explicit images.
13. **Creating or Sharing Explicit Images:** Creating or sharing explicit images of a child, even by another child, is illegal. However, formal action may not always be taken by the police, depending on the circumstances.
14. **Consent for Photography:** Foster carers should obtain a child's permission before taking pictures or videos and ensure the child understands who will see them and why. Photos of fostered children should not be shared without the consent of those with parental responsibility for the child (usually the child’s social worker and their parents). Foster carers should not include photos of fostered children on their social media.
15. **Taking Photographs:** Regularly taking photographs of the child can help record their life and contribute to their Life Story book.
16. **Consent for School Photos:** Foster carers should clarify who can give consent for a child to have their picture taken or be filmed for school-related activities.
17. **Smart Mobile Phones:** Smartphones offer text messaging, picture and video capture, and internet access. The use of these devices, particularly sharing personal information, should be carefully monitored due to potential security implications.
18. **Mobile Phone Guidelines:** The guidelines provide information on barring and filtering mechanisms operated by mobile network providers to restrict children under 18 from accessing inappropriate content. Foster carers are advised to explore these services with the network provider used by the child or young person.

These guidelines aim to ensure the safe and responsible use of technology and online platforms by children and young people in foster care. Foster carers play a vital role in educating and safeguarding children in these areas.Top of Form

## **Bullying**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - independent fostering agencies- duty to secure welfare.

Fostering Services- National Minimum Standards

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively.

For further information, see also:

* [Anti-bullying Alliance (ABA)](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/).
* [Kidscape](http://www.kidscape.org.uk/).
* [Bully Watch](http://www.bullywatch.org/).
* [Advice for Parents and Carers on Cyberbullying (Department for Education, 2015)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444865/Advice_for_parents_on_cyberbullying.pdf).
1. **Shared Responsibility:** Everyone involved in caring for children is responsible for countering bullying and fostering a culture that promotes acceptable behaviour while reducing or preventing bullying. Foster carers have a vital role in this process.
2. **Seriousness of Bullying:** Foster carers must take bullying seriously because it can significantly impact a child's well-being, leading to issues such as poor self-esteem, depression, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts.
3. **Children's Guide:** The Children's Guide provided to foster children should contain information and advice on dealing with bullying.
4. **Signs of Bullying:** Foster carers should watch for signs of bullying and take steps to prevent it. Bullying can occur at school, in the local area, or even within the foster home.
5. **Types of Bullying:** Bullying can take various forms, including physical, verbal, or online (cyberbullying).
6. **Action in Case of Bullying:** If bullying occurs within the foster home, it may be appropriate to hold a meeting, preferably involving the children involved, to discuss ways to prevent or reduce bullying.
7. **Encouraging Reporting:** Children may be hesitant to report bullying, so foster carers should encourage open communication to help children feel comfortable reporting incidents.
8. **Handling Serious Bullying:** Serious or persistent bullying should be reported immediately to the Supervising Social Worker and the Fostering Service, who may consider child protection measures or involving the authorities.
9. **Record Keeping:** All incidents of bullying should be recorded in the daily records of the children involved, both the alleged victim and the alleged bully. These records can be valuable in identifying patterns over time.

## **Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines**

Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.
* Regulation 12 - Arrangements for the protection of children.

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

* Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children.

Relevant Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) involves taking advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under 18. It can occur through various means, including technology, and often involves other forms of exploitation, such as sexual exploitation.

1. **County Lines Explained:** County lines refers to the activities of gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into different areas, using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines." These gangs exploit children and vulnerable adults to transport and sell drugs, often using coercion and violence.
2. **Signs of County Lines Exploitation:** There are warning signs that a child may be involved in county lines or CCE, and these signs should be carefully observed. Examples include going missing, having unexplained money or possessions, and displaying changes in behaviour.
3. **Response to CCE:** Foster carers should work with the Fostering Service and the placing authority to develop plans for keeping children safe from CCE. This may involve sharing concerns with the child's social worker and the police if necessary.
4. **Data Sharing:** Sharing information and intelligence is crucial to preventing criminal exploitation and county lines activities.
5. **Training and Support:** Foster carers should receive training on recognizing and addressing child criminal exploitation, and they must understand the importance of multi-agency planning to disrupt the abuse while supporting the young person.
6. **Child's Well-being:** The welfare of the child should always come first, and relationships based on consistency, stability, and respectful communication are essential when dealing with exploited children.
7. **Child Victims:** Children involved in county lines and CCE should be recognized as victims of crime, even if they don't initially see themselves as such. Their complex needs, including trauma and mental health issues, should be considered in the response.
8. **Support for Other Children:** Concerns about the involvement of other children in the household should be shared with Children's Social Care and social workers.
9. **Training Resources:** Additional resources and guidance are available for professionals to address criminal exploitation and county lines.

The information provided emphasises the need for vigilance, reporting, and collaboration among foster carers, social workers, and other professionals to address the issues of bullying and child criminal exploitation effectively in the context of foster care.**Top of Form**

## **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 6 - Promoting Health and Wellbeing.
* Standard 21 - Supervision and Support of Foster Carers.
* Standard 29 - Notifications of Significant Events.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.

Relevant Information and Guidance

* [What to do if You're Worried a Child is being Abused: Advice for Practitioners (DfE)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-youre-worried-a-child-is-being-abused--2)
* [Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)](https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/)
* [Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and Guide for Practitioners (DfE February 2017)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners)

**Definition of CSE:** Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse that can take various forms, including contact or non-contact activities. It can occur online or in person, with victims being coerced, manipulated, or deceived into sexual activity in exchange for something they need or want, or for the financial advantage of the perpetrator. CSE may not always involve physical contact and can also occur through technology.

**Grooming:** Many children and young people are groomed into sexually exploitative relationships and may initially view their abusers as their 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend.'

**Vulnerability of Children in Care:** Children in Care, as well as those with special needs, or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, can be more vulnerable to exploitation.

**Barriers to Reporting:** It can be challenging for children to disclose that they are being sexually exploited, especially when they do not initially recognise the abuse. Threats from abusers and feelings of self-blame can deter young people from seeking help.

**Key Signs of CSE:** Foster carers should be attentive to signs that a child or young person may be experiencing sexual exploitation. These signs may include going missing, unexplained money or possessions, or changes in behaviour.

**Reporting Concerns:** Foster carers should record their concerns and share them with the child's allocated social worker or the Emergency Duty Team if outside working hours. In cases of immediate danger, they should call 999.

**Supportive Action:** When concerns about CSE have been identified before a child comes to live with foster carers, the Placement Plan should outline daily arrangements to keep the child safe.

**Support for Foster Carers:** Caring for a child who is being sexually exploited can be emotionally challenging, and foster carers should seek support from their supervising social worker, local support groups, and the child's allocated social worker.

**Going Missing:** Many children who are sexually exploited may go missing from their home or school, and foster carers should follow guidance on missing children.

## **Extremism and Radicalisation**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 4 – Safeguarding Children.
* Standard 6 - Promoting good health and wellbeing.
* Standard 21 -Supervision and Support of Foster Carers

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer

Relevant Guidance: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/>

1. **Understanding Extremism:** Children and young people can be exposed to extremist messages through various means, including family, friends, direct contact with extremist groups, or indirectly via the internet. This exposure puts them at risk of involvement in criminal activities and significant harm.
2. **No Obvious Profile:** There is no specific profile of a person likely to become involved in extremism. Radicalisation can be a different process for each individual and may occur over an extended period or in a short time frame.
3. **Indicators of Radicalisation:** Indicators of radicalisation may include changes in behaviour, social isolation, increased interest in extremist content, and associations with known extremists. It's crucial to report concerns to the supervising social worker and the child's social worker or Fostering on call.
4. **Online Content:** Online content, especially social media, can normalise radical views and promote extreme content. Children can be trusting and may not appreciate bias, which can lead them to adopt extremist views.
5. **Emergency Response:** Foster carers should consider the need for an emergency response in rare situations where there is information about an imminent violent act, the possession of weapons, or other materials that pose a threat. In such cases, call 999.

The provided information emphasises the importance of recognising signs of CCE, CSE and radicalisation, reporting concerns, and seeking support to safeguard the well-being of children in foster care. Foster carers play a crucial role in early identification and prevention of these risks.Top of Form

Please click on this link for further detail on Child Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation, County Lines, Radicalisation and child trafficking and modern slavery:

<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/coventry-local-safeguarding-children-board/exploitation/3>

## **Health and Safety in Foster Homes**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 10 - Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety, and healthy care.

See also:

* [ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)](https://www.rospa.com/)
* [CAPT (Child Accident Prevention Trust)](https://www.capt.org.uk/)
* [Foods Standards Agency](http://www.food.gov.uk/the-website-of-the-food-standards-agency)
1. **Safety Training:** Foster carers receive training on health and safety, and their responsibilities in this regard are continually reviewed by their Supervising Social Worker.
2. **Home Environment:** Foster homes should provide a warm, welcoming, clean, and well-maintained environment that ensures the safety and well-being of the children placed there.
3. **Safety Equipment:** Discussions with the Fostering Service may include the provision of safety equipment.
4. **Fire Safety:** Families should establish a fire exit plan and ensure smoke alarms are in place on each level, with regular battery checks. Foster Carers are advised to contact their local Fire Brigade to conduct a home fire safety check, these are free of charge.
5. **Electrical Safety:** Foster homes should avoid using multi-way adapters, keep electrical appliances safe and in good working order, and ensure that leads from kettles or irons are not accessible to children.
6. **Kitchen Safety:** When cooking, foster carers should turn pan handles toward the back of the cooker and use stair gates to restrict young children's access to the kitchen.
7. **Toxic Substances:** Toxic and hazardous substances, such as cleaning materials, should be safely stored out of children's reach.
8. **Outdoor Safety:** Pools, ponds, and chemicals should be securely covered or fenced, and garden games, like trampolines, slides and swings, should be secure with soft surroundings. Poisonous plants should be removed from the garden.
9. **Pets:** Foster carers should keep pets' areas, including the garden, clean and regularly maintained. The service will complete a specific risk assessment in relation to pets which may pose a risk to children including dogs.
10. **The use of video cameras/CCTV:** Adviseto all foster carers and fostering services is that CCTV, or any other form of video or audio surveillance, is**not necessary or appropriate**for monitoring or managing children’s behaviour.
11. **Annual Review:** Health and safety aspects of the foster home are reviewed annually, and issues are resolved with your Supervising Social Worker.

**Types of Fostering**

The information outlines different types of foster care:

* **Mainstream:** Mainstream foster carers have no pre-existing relationship with the child they are caring for. The length of time this may be required for varies but children in these arrangements may return home, move to extended family members, move on to legal permanence via adoption or move to independence. If the care plan for the child becomes remaining in foster care into independence, then long-term fostering will be considered either with the current carers or another household.
* **Long-term:** Permanent placements for children unable to return to their families.  Foster Carers are approved for long-term fostering at Foster Panel for specific children with whom there has been an assessment of their capacity to provide care for those child/children for the remainder of their childhood. In Coventry, long-term matches are agreed for individual children rather than carers being approved with a generic long-term approval.
* **Short Stays** (previously known as respite): This is a type of short-term fostering, it usually occurs over weekends or short periods of time, from a few hours each week to a weekend each month. It is often used to give other foster carers opportunity to rest and recharge or attend a family function such as a funeral, in which the child in their care cannot attend.
* **Connected Persons Foster Carer**: These are carers that the children know. A Connected Person is defined as "A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker". Relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent."
* **Parent and Child:** This is where a foster carer supports a parent in learning to care for their children, in their home. The parent being supported could be a mother, father or both. Parent and child foster homes provide new parents with a positive alternative to a more institutional residential care home, which can be isolating for new parents and do not replicate or role model ‘normal life’ as well.
* **Out of Hours Fostering:** Providing care to children who come to the attention of Children’s services out of office hours, usually in emergency circumstances.
* **Next Steps**: This is a specialist fostering scheme with intensive support for children and young people who are stepping down from residential care. For further information please click on the following link: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31277/next_steps_fostering_brochure_201920>
* **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**: Foster homes for children who have entered the UK without family. Each year a number of young people arrive in Coventry from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and other parts of the world, without an adult to care for them. The young people are usually aged between 10 and 18. They are often traumatised by their experiences and need support, advice and care to help them come to terms with this and to adjust to life in the UK. As a foster carer, if you have a child come to live with you in this situation the Placement Plan and future reviews will be the place which will help you understand the plan for the child and what you can do to help support the child to meet their own cultural and ethnic needs. Your Supervising Social Worker can help you to develop a better understanding of the circumstances and what support can be accessed for both you and the child.
* **Staying Put:** Once children in your care reach 18 years old, they are no longer fostered. However, in many cases it is in their best interests to remain living with you, as is the case for many young adults. Your Supervising Social Worker will discuss this with you when your foster child reaches the age 16 years as part of their care planning.
* **Short Breaks:** Children who require short breaks fostering most often have a disability, additional needs or a particularly challenging behavioural issue which means the parents or carers are under considerable pressure and would benefit from a break.

Short break fostering involves working closely with the full time carer or parent who is usually legally responsible for the child.

## **Children with Disabilities**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 6 - Promoting Health and Wellbeing.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety, and healthy care.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.

Please also see: [Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years: Statutory Guidance for Organisations who work with and Support Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (2014)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)

This chapter talks about caring for children with disabilities and/or complex health needs. There are various types of disabilities and complex health conditions, and it is essential to ensure that those working with the child have a clear understanding of a child's specific disability and its daily impact when you care for such children. Sometimes, a child may have been labelled with a condition like "autistic," which might not fully describe their unique characteristics. Collaborating with other involved individuals is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the child's needs.

It is important to emphasise that children's unique qualities should be recognised before their special needs. Children with disabilities may require assistance in the following areas:

* Support with mobility difficulties.
* Support with Learning Difficulties and social syndromes such as those associated with neurodiversity.
* Sensory impairments

The sort of help that children with complex health needs may be:

* Special medication and supporting people with epilepsy.
* Support with breathing, eating and other daily functions like using the toilet and bathing.

Of course, some children need help in both of these categories. Some children have entitlements to benefits that are not affected by being in a foster home. See [Finances and Insurance](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/coventry/money_insurance.html).

When caring for a child with disabilities, you should have the necessary support in place before the child's arrival. The Placement Planning meeting should detail all the support, including medical needs, required for the child, and clarify the decisions you can make concerning the child's daily life.

All children with disabilities should have an Education, Health, and Care Plan, outlining the support they require to make the most of their educational opportunities at school, pre-school, and college.

Many children with disabilities need help and support from services throughout their lives. Your Supervising Social Worker or the child’s social worker will help you to find the right support and advice from relevant agencies, including following their interests and taking part in activities they enjoy.

**Local Offer**

Coventry have their own local offer which sets out  the support they expect to be available for local children and young people aged 0-25 with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disabilities, whether or not they have an [Education, Health and Care Plan](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/ed_health_care_plan.html).

Coventry’s Local Offer can be viewed via this link: https://letstalk.coventry.gov.uk/coventry-send-local-offer

The Local Offer must include information about:

* Special educational, health and social care provision for children and young people with SEN or disabilities – this should include online and blended learning.
* Arrangements for identifying and assessing children and young people’s SEN – this should include arrangements for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments.
* Education provision and post-16 education and training provision.
* Information about provision to assist in preparing young people for adulthood.
* Arrangements for travel to and from education institutions.
* Childcare, including suitable provision for disabled children and those with SEN.
* Support available to young people in higher education, particularly the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and the process and timescales for making an application for DSA.
* Arrangements for resolving disagreements and for mediation, and details about making complaints.Top of Form

**Placement Plans and Looked After Reviews (Also known as All About Me meetings)**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

Foster carers are encouraged to attend these reviews and collaborate with relevant professionals, family members, and the child's social worker to ensure the best care and support for the child.

Overall, the information underscores the significance of maintaining a safe and nurturing environment for children in foster care while highlighting the various types of fostering and the importance of planning and review processes to meet the needs of each child.Top of Form

## **Settling a Child into Your Home**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant them.
* Standard 5 - Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed need.
* Standard 11 - Preparation for a placement.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

All children should receive information about you, your family, and your home before coming to live with you, except in cases of emergency. Whenever possible, children may have visited your home before the final decision for them to move is made. Additionally, there might be an introduction period where they can express their thoughts about living with you.

This preparatory information can assist in the settling process. However, each child responds differently to entering care or moving to a new placement.

Review the information provided by the child's social worker and clarify any uncertainties before the placement begins.

Engage in conversations with the other children in your household to help them adapt to the new child's presence.

Some children will require more reassurance than others; some may exhibit withdrawal or behaviour that you may find challenging initially.

It is crucial to remain calm and set clear boundaries while reassuring the child. In the case of withdrawal, offer them space but also provide opportunities for them to talk or spend time with you.

It is important that in every circumstance, the child is made to feel welcome in your home. Simple things like offering food and drink and showing the child around make all the difference. It is advised that foster carers have a set of toiletries to give children when they first arrive which is suited to their age and stage of development. You should ensure that children understand what your household routines are about using the bathroom at night or accessing the kitchen.

Pay attention to the child's physical appearance and personal belongings. Depending on their circumstances, there may be significant gaps in their belongings that need to be addressed. Approach this with sensitivity and patience, avoiding criticism or dismissiveness.

If a child is moving on from you, their belongings should be appropriately packed using suitable luggage. It is never acceptable to put children’s belongings into bin bags.

It is important for the child to understand that if you are discussing behaviour this is not discussing them as individuals. Changes may take time, and it is essential to communicate that it's okay for them to feel anger but guide them on how to manage it, like going for a walk or engaging in age-appropriate activities.

Some children may initially display their best behaviour, fearing they may be sent away if they express their true feelings.

Remember that your Supervising Social Worker is there to support you through any difficulties. Discuss challenges as they arise and keep records.

**Your Family's Adjustment**

* Understand that your own family will also need time to adapt. Your children may feel neglected, and they may even imitate the new child's behaviour. Developing a Safer Caring family policy can be helpful. Explain the household rules and expectations to the child.
* Gather relevant information about the child's needs from their social worker and parents whenever possible.

## **Caring for your Foster Child**

**Making Decisions**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety, and healthy care.

Foster carers and children in care often face challenges when making everyday decisions, such as haircuts, school trips, and sleepovers. Delegated authority is the process through which the responsibility for day-to-day decisions concerning a child or young person is transferred to you as their foster carer.

Decisions on delegated authority depend on the long-term plan for the child. Delegated authority is discussed at the placement agreement meeting and then reviewed at each looked after review. You will receive a copy of a document detailing which decisions you have the authority to make.

It is the social worker's responsibility to work with parents to clarify what decisions you can make and ensure that it is recorded in the Placement Plan. Consider the child's views when making these decisions. In some cases, a child may have sufficient age and understanding to make certain decisions themselves.

Delegated authority includes decisions related to staying with friends, using social media, education, faith, and religious events. You should make these decisions like any good parent, ensuring safety and appropriateness.

## **Risk**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 4 – Safeguarding Children
* Standard 5 – Children Missing from Care

. Standard 7 -Leisure Activities

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 3 - Understand health, safety, and healthy caring.
* Standard 6 – Safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm).

See also the Department for Education's guidelines on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Children in care: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2>

Risk can be broadly defined as the likelihood of an event occurring with either positive or negative consequences.

When conducting risk assessments, it is important to adopt practices that are sensitive to risks, rather than being excessively risk averse. This approach ensures a realistic and proportionate handling of risks, allowing children and young people to grow and learn effectively.

Risk assessments play a crucial role in foster care, offering support to both you and the child or young person in addressing identified risks.

However, there are instances when external intervention is necessary, and certain risks are deemed unacceptable and must be avoided.

The child's social worker and the Fostering Service are responsible for providing you with updated risk assessments regarding the children in your care. You should also be actively involved in the development of these assessments and adhere to the prescribed risk management procedures.

The primary purpose of any risk assessment is to mitigate potential harm or the risk of harm and provide evidence of risk reduction. This involves an evaluation of all risks, along with the control measures needed to minimise them effectively. These assessments should be purpose-fit and consider all relevant issues.

Most risk assessments foster carers undertake are dynamic and in the moment.

Children and young people placed in foster care may have encountered life events that influence the level and type of care they require for their safety and well-being.

Risk assessments are valuable tools for mitigating potential issues, and it is crucial to seek guidance regarding risky behaviours rather than relying on chance.

Additionally, refer to the guidelines on Positive Relationships and Behaviour Management Procedures: <https://coventrychildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_behav_man.html?zoom_highlight=positive+relationhips>

Social workers should include a risk assessment as part of the Placement Referral form, which informs the matching process. This assessment distinguishes between factual information and opinions and records the risk level and frequency in various environments. It also notes any vulnerabilities in the child and outlines actions to address these risks. You and the Fostering Service should both be confident in your ability to provide appropriate and safe care for the child.

The level of risk may evolve over time, necessitating regular risk assessments to observe how risks have been effectively managed. Your experience in caring for the child or young person is valuable in contributing to the risk assessment process.

Any changes in risk should be incorporated into ongoing work with the child or young person, including supervision, risk management meetings, and the child’s reviews.

The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that you comply with risk assessments and that they remain up-to-date. Your Safer Caring Plan will be amended and updated for each child or young person in your care, following a new child or a new issue that has arisen, in order to include specific measures to manage and reduce risk.

If a child or young person moves to another foster home, the risk assessment should accompany them and be updated as required.Top of Form

## **Health**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 6 - Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety, and healthy care.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.

You should receive essential medical information about a child when they come to live with you. Where a child is placed in an emergency, this information should be provided as quickly as possible. Comprehensive details about a child's health are crucial, particularly when they have health concerns that may pose risks to themselves, you, or others. All health-related issues should be fully communicated to you, along with the support you can expect to receive.

Every Child in care needs to have an up to date health assessment so that a health care plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and be included as part of the child's overall Care Plan. If they do not have one, the child's social worker should arrange for an assessment to create a plan. This plan should be available for the child's first Looked After Review, which is scheduled within 20 working days of moving into their new foster home.

Health assessments occur at specific intervals. The child should have a copy of their health plan.

* The first medical must be done before the first placement or, if not possible, before the child’s first Looked After Review (unless one has been done within the previous 3 months).
* For children under five years, further medicals should occur at least once every six months.
* For children aged over five years, further medicals should occur at least annually.

You play a crucial role in caring for and promoting the health of the children in your care. This involves engaging with them, providing information about maintaining their health and well-being, and encouraging them to pursue their interests and leisure activities.

It is essential to maintain a record of the child's health and ensure they attend health assessments and relevant appointments. Information you possess about the child, including their daily routine, preferences, and health concerns, may need to be shared with other professionals.

Any child in your care must be registered at a general practitioner (GP), dentist, and optician and if you have the delegated authority, to take the child for any required treatments. This is typically decided when completing the Placement Plan.

Whenever a child is administered medication, it is vital to document the time, frequency, and dosage. This applies to both prescribed and over the counter medicines. Make a record of this on your daily recording. All medications should be stored securely and be easily accessible to those who need them.

Assist children and young people in making informed decisions about their health and consider their views when making decisions.

In the event of an accident or incident, record the details of what occurred and inform your Supervising Social Worker and the child's social worker as soon as possible. If a child has a bruise or mark, it is important to draw this on a body map, to identify where the bruise or mark is on their body.

## **ActivitiesTop of Form**

Physical activities help children and young people in many different ways. The NHS state: Children and young people need to do 2 types of physical activity each week:

* aerobic exercise
* exercises to strengthen their muscles and bones

Children and young people aged 5 to 18 should:

* aim for an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous intensity physical activity a day across the week
* take part in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity across the week to develop movement skills, muscles and bones
* reduce the time spent sitting or lying down and break up long periods of not moving with some activity. Aim to spread activity throughout the day

**What counts as moderate activity?**

Moderate intensity activities will raise your heart rate, and make you breathe faster and feel warmer. One way to tell if you are working at a moderate intensity level is if you can still talk, but not sing. Children and young people should do a range of different activities across the week. Examples include:

* walking to school or walking the dog
* playground activities, including jumping, running and catching
* physical education
* sports, like football or tennis
* swimming
* skipping
* dancing
* skateboarding or rollerblading
* cycling

**What activities strengthen muscles and bones?**

Examples include:

* gymnastics
* football
* jumping
* martial arts
* sit-ups, press-ups and other similar exercises (for young people)
* resistance exercises with exercise bands, weight machines or handheld weights (for young people)

**Exercising safely**

Children and young people should:

* get medical advice about exercising if they have a health condition
* do exercise that is suitable for their age, ability and experience
* start any new exercise slowly and increase it bit by bit
* use protective equipment, for example for cycling and skateboarding

Young people can use weights for resistance exercise if a qualified adult trains them to use weights correctly and supervises them.

**Physical activity recommendation for other age groups:**

* [Physical activity guidelines for children under 5 years](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/physical-activity-guidelines-children-under-five-years/)

You should assist children and young people in identifying places where they can engage in activities they are interested in and support them in attending these activities. This might be linked to their educational setting and could include sports or other enjoyable activities that boost their self-esteem.

## **Medication and First Aid**

You should be clear about the decisions you can make regarding medical treatment, and these decisions should be recorded in the child or young person's Placement Plan.

First aid boxes should be available in your home and each vehicle used to transport children. Ensure that the first aid boxes are kept in a safe and accessible place, out of reach of small children and all medications/creams etc are in date.

Your Supervising Social Worker will ensure that first aid boxes are fully stocked during Health and Safety checks. Attend health and safety training opportunities when they are available.

If a child is at risk or requires first aid, provide first aid if safe, and contact your Supervising Social Worker promptly. Do not delay the process of getting medical help. In a medical emergency, call for an ambulance or the police if needed.

Before help arrives, provide any available information to medical professionals, including samples of vomit and any drugs.

If a child in your care has specific health needs, the child's social worker should provide information and advice on specialist advisory or support groups.

You must have guidance on giving prescribed drugs for children and advice on administering drugs not on prescription. Record all medication administration and medical incidents, such as hospital admissions or consultant/GP appointments.

Record any health-related issues discussed in supervision meetings.

You will receive training related to managing and administering medication.

Home Remedies include over-the-counter medicines like Paracetamol, Aspirin, homeopathic remedies, herbal remedies, aromatherapy, vitamin supplements, and alternative therapies. The NHS state: ‘Never give aspirin to children under the age of 16 (unless their doctor prescribes it). It can make children more likely to develop a very rare but serious condition called Reye’s syndrome. Aspirin should not be given to children unless prescribed by a medical practitioner’.

Home Remedies, except for Paracetamol, should only be given for a maximum of 48 hours. If symptoms persist, the child should see a GP before further dosages are given.

All medicines, including hospital medications, should be recorded.

The record should include details such as the name of the medicine, the time administered, the dose, the person who administered it, and any side effects or reactions.

First aid and records of all medicines given should be documented in the daily record. If advice is sought from a GP, NHS 111, or a pharmacist, details of the discussions should be recorded. If an accident occurs resulting in a visit to the GP or hospital, this should also be recorded.

## **Emotional Health and Well-being**

Helping children in care to achieve good mental and emotional health is a fundamental component of positive health and wellbeing and an essential pre-condition to successful learning, happiness, and success in life. The relationship between foster care and mental health is a close one, as children in care are at greater risk of developing severe or complex mental health conditions.

Many children in care come into care with established physical and mental health issues that have not been identified due to neglect. There is a risk that the experience of being in care can exacerbate these difficulties if they are not dealt with promptly, and services and support to address them are delayed. Being in care can also generate other stresses in the child and young person’s life that create new health problems for them, especially in relation to emotional and mental health, which can get in the way of them achieving their best.

Please click on the following link for further information about the mental health of children in care: <https://www.thefca.co.uk/resources/blogs/latest-blogs/foster-care-and-mental-health/> Top of Form

## **Relationships, Sex and Sexual Health**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 6 - Promoting Health and Wellbeing.
* Standard 8 - Promoting Educational Attainment.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety, and healthy care.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.

See also:

* [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk/) - information, facts, and advice on contraception and sexual health.
* [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk/) - general health information and signposting to local health services.
* [www.familylives.org.uk/advice/secondary/health-and-development/talking-about-sex/](http://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/secondary/health-and-development/talking-about-sex/) - information and advice for parents/carers.

When addressing relationships and sex with children and young people in foster care, it is important to understand that this subject involves various aspects, including friendships, body development, and changes.

Incorporate the family values or religious beliefs related to this subject into the Placement Plan. While a parent's wishes regarding their child's sex education should be considered, the primary focus should be on safeguarding the young person's health and well-being.

Age-appropriate conversations about relationships should begin early in a child's life and continue as they grow. If an older teenager is placed with you, it's never too late to discuss sex and relationships. All children need guidance, communication, and information on these subjects, even if they don't always appear interested in what you have to say. With the availability of inappropriate information on media and the internet, it's crucial for them to distinguish between what's healthy and unhealthy both physically and emotionally.

Remember to engage both boys and girls, and do not assume that one caregiver is taking care of it. Both caregivers should be involved in these conversations. Moreover, it is essential to approach children who may be exploring their sexuality or gender identity or following a particular lifestyle without any abusive or illegal aspects, with respect.

Discussing relationships and sex can be more complex if a child or young person has experienced sexual abuse. In such cases, working closely with professionals, including the child's social worker, is necessary to ensure clarity regarding appropriate relationships and sexual behaviour and to help rebuild self-esteem and establish trusting relationships. Foster carers should avoid projecting their personal feelings about the subject onto the child, as this might make the child uncomfortable or unclear about the topic.

Foster carers should talk about positive and healthy relationships with children and young people; what these are and what they look like. Discussions around domestic abuse can be relevant if appropriate.

Research suggests that parents or carers discussing this subject with children can help delay their initiation of sexual activity and promote responsible contraceptive use. Effective relationships and sex education, both at home and in school, are essential for young people to make informed decisions about their lives and resist peer pressure. Schools are required to provide relationships and sex education as part of their curriculum, following national and local guidelines.

It is crucial to address any concerns you have about a child's strong desire to have a baby. Seek support from social workers or supervising social workers to identify appropriate agencies that can provide advice and support.

Although discouraging this is important, foster carers should understand that some young people may engage in sexual activity before the legal age of consent (16). In such cases, discuss steps to reduce the risk of pregnancy, infection, and contact with sexual health services. If a young person is suspected or known to be pregnant or have a sexually transmitted infection, consult with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker to determine appropriate actions as soon as possible.

For children under the age of 13, who are unable to give consent to any sexual activity, if you suspect that a child in your care, has engaged in sexual activity, this should be reported to the children’s social worker. Inform your supervising social worker and the child's social worker immediately.

Confidentiality is crucial in promoting positive relationships and sex education, and personal information should not be shared unless there is a risk or suspected risk to the child's well-being.

If you suspect a child is being abused, exploited, or at risk of significant harm, encourage them to agree to steps that will protect them. If they do not agree and you remain concerned, share the information without their consent with the child's social worker or your supervising social worker.

## **Positive Relationships and Behaviour**

Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.
* Regulation 13 - Behaviour management and children missing from foster parent's home.
* Regulation 17 - Support, training and information for foster parents.

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 3 - Promoting Positive Behaviour and Relationships.

Relevant Guidance

[Positive and Proactive Care: Reducing the Need for Restrictive Interventions - Department of Health and Social Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300293/JRA_DoH_Guidance_on_RP_web_accessible.pdf)

This chapter offers guidance to foster carers on behaviour management, emphasising the importance of supporting positive behaviour and conflict de-escalation.

Children learn appropriate behaviour by observing, listening to, and interacting with the adults who care for them. They develop their morals and values from the examples set by the adults in their lives.

Children require clear boundaries and consistent rules. Foster carers should have high expectations for the children and be explicit about what is acceptable and what isn't. It is crucial for foster carers to understand, manage, and address children and young people's behaviour, helping them take responsibility for their actions and learn conflict resolution.

Foster carers should not be expected to manage behaviour that they find challenging in isolation, but rather follow a multidisciplinary approach with support from other professionals. The fostering service should provide a comprehensive assessment of needs to determine the appropriate approach and ensure that the placement is well-matched with the foster family.

Referral and matching information, Placement agreements, and reviews are essential for ongoing planning and evaluation. The fostering service should share necessary and up-to-date information with foster carers, including the child's care plan.

Setting clear rules and expectations is vital when a foster child is new to your home. It's important to consider the child's background and early life experiences when establishing boundaries. The safer caring plan should be implemented, and the child should be aware of it.

Consistency in treating the child is crucial, especially in two-caregiver households.

**Positive Behaviour**

Promoting positive behaviour should involve everyone and follow a multidisciplinary approach. Foster carers play a significant role in a child's daily life, making good parenting skills essential. Training on behaviour management techniques and strategies helps foster carers establish positive relationships with children, leading to more harmonious lives and boosting the child's self-esteem.

 **Key elements include:**

* Creating an environment and culture that fosters, models, and supports positive behaviour.
* Having high expectations for all foster children.
* Building trust and secure relationships.
* Assisting children in developing a sense of permanence and belonging.
* Promoting self-esteem, attachment, emotional resilience, and identity.
* Preparing and supporting foster carers to manage behaviour and related situations.

Children should be encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships, be assertive, and resolve conflicts constructively. They should learn to take age-appropriate responsibility for their behaviour. Respect for a child's privacy and confidentiality should align with good parenting practices.

Foster carers should receive training on positive care and children's behaviour, including de-escalation techniques. Coventry offers various training courses specific to this, such as: Attachment, Therapeutic Parenting and Behaviour Management, PACE and DPP.

Coventry promotes the use of the model: **Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP),** an approach which allows foster carers to get beyond the defences and blocked trust of children in their care by developing an attitude of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE). By helping participants understand and respond to the impact of developmental trauma on children, DPP aims to help reduce the cycle of broken relationships experienced by many young people who have been removed from their birth families.

**PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy)** model can be useful in working with children. [PACE](https://ddpnetwork.org/glossary/pace/) is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make children feel safe. PACE focuses on the whole child, not simply the behaviour. It helps children feel more secure with their carers and reflect upon themselves, their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, building the skills that are so necessary for maintaining a successful and fulfilling life. The child discovers that they are doing the best that they can and are not bad or lazy or selfish.

When children experience their foster carers doing the best they can to understand them and trying to work out together more effective ways for the child to understand, make sense of and manage their emotions, thoughts and behaviour they start to believe that their foster carers really will keep on trying until things get better for all of them.

For foster carers, using PACE most of the time, they can reduce the level of conflict, defensiveness and withdrawal that tends to be ever present in the lives of children in care. Using PACE enables foster carers to see the strengths and positive features that lie underneath more negative and challenging behaviour.

**House Rules**

These should be established, explained to the children, and recorded in the placement plan and safe caring document, but should be minimal. Children should not feel that they are being treated differently to other members of the household. Ideally children should know these expectations before they come to live with you. These could be as simple as taking shoes off in the house.

**Managing Behaviour that Challenges you**

You should feel empowered to develop skills and strategies to manage conflicts and difficult emotions. Foster carers must maintain clear, consistent boundaries. Foster carers should be trained in managing their responses and feelings, especially when you feel children exhibit behaviour that you find challenging.

Behaviour you may find challenging in children can stem from various causes. Foster carers need information about the child's history to understand and provide the necessary support. Training is available to help support your learning and development of strategies to use when faced with behaviours that may challenge you.

**Dealing with inappropriate behaviour**

Sanctions for behaviour should be proportionate, child-focused, and the last resort. Child-focused discussions and professional support are essential for setting appropriate sanctions. Several non-approved sanctions must never be imposed on children. Wherever possible, foster carers should de-escalate any incidents with fostered children.

Physical intervention should be avoided and used only as a last resort to prevent immediate harm or injury. The fostering service should be promptly notified in the case of any need for physical intervention.

Involvement of the police should be avoided where possible, to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of children. Reporting and collaboration with relevant professionals and authorities is crucial.

It is essential to consider any disabilities a child may have, which can affect their behaviour, social skills, communication, and understanding, requiring additional behaviour management support. Collaborating with a multidisciplinary team is necessary to develop a consistent approach to support the child.

Behaviour you find challenging in children may be the result of their previous experiences, so it is important to address the root causes with sensitivity and care. Foster carers should work within a therapeutic or PACE framework (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy).

Having clear and consistent boundaries, effective de-escalation techniques, and creative strategies tailored to each child's needs are critical. Foster carers should receive support in managing their responses to behaviour that they find challenging.

Behaviour management should always be child-focused, proportionate, and consistent, with an emphasis on supporting the child's growth and development. Foster carers should collaborate with professionals and maintain clear communication regarding sanctions and other interventions.

There are different support options available with Coventry, which include RISE, Edge of Care, Children and Family Workers and fostering Mentors.

**The use of non-approved actions should never be used**. Foster carers should discuss their approach with professionals, including supervising social workers, the child's social worker, or RISE. The following actions are non-approved, which means they may never be imposed upon children:

* Any form of punishment; any intentional use of force as punishment, including slapping, punching, rough handling and throwing objects;
* Any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. Restraint is only used on a child where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. Foster carers are discouraged from using restraint and should de-escalation techniques as an alternative. If you
* Any sanction relating to the consumption or deprivation of food or drink;
* Any restriction on a child's family time with their parents, relatives or friends; visits to the child by their parents, relatives or friends; a child's communications with any person they know, both personally and professionally; or their access to any telephone helpline providing counselling or advice for children. This does not prevent family time or communication being restricted in exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary to do so to protect the child or others. If you feel that this is needed, please contact your supervising social worker or out of hours fostering.
* Any requirement that a child wear distinctive or inappropriate clothes;
* The use or withholding of medication or medical or dental treatment;
* The intentional deprivation of sleep;
* The modification of a child's behaviour through bribery or the use of threats;
* Any humiliation towards a child or actions that could cause them to feel ridiculed;
* Giving any fine or financial penalty, other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum by way of reparation;
* Any intimate physical examination of a child;
* The withholding of aids/equipment needed by a child with disabilities;
* Any measure which involves a child in the imposition of any measure against any other child; or the sanction of a group of children for the behaviour of an individual child;
* Swearing at the child or the use of foul, demeaning or humiliating language or measures.

**Searches**

Foster carers should use cooperation and positive communication to address concerns about children potentially concealing items that could pose a risk to themselves or others. Foster carers must not conduct body searches, pat down searches, searches of clothing worn by children. Foster carers can look through a foster child’s bedroom if they are concerned for their safety. This must then be recorded and discussed with your Supervising Social Worker.

**Serious Incidents**

In cases of serious incidents or emergencies, immediate action should be taken to protect children. The fostering service should be notified in the case of serious incidents or police involvement. At no time should you act unless confident of managing the situation safely, without escalation or further injury.

Foster carers should never engage in physical intervention unless they are confident in their ability to manage the situation safely, avoiding further harm or escalation. In some cases, foster carers may use light touch to guide, lead, or stop a child. Additionally, the presence of the foster carer can be employed to prevent a child from leaving a particular area or negotiate a change in their plans or actions.

## **Alcohol, Drugs, and Smoking**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 5 - Promoting Educational Attainment.
* Standard 6 - Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 3 - Understand health and safety and healthcare.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.

See also:

* [Talk To Frank](http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/alcohol)
* [NHS Choices](http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx)
* [Electronic cigarettes – NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/)
* [Drinkaware](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/)

It is important to recognise that not all young people engage in smoking, drinking, or drug use. If you have concerns in this regard, it is essential to communicate with the child or young person's social worker and your supervising social worker. Particular attention should be paid when drinking or drug use appears to be habitual or excessive for a young person.

Foster carers should ensure that young people are educated about alcohol. The more informed young people are, the better equipped they are to make responsible decisions about smoking, drinking, and drug use. Open communication is a valuable tool to convey the right messages and information.

The behaviour of young people concerning alcohol and drugs can be influenced partly through persuasion, so it is vital to maintain open channels of communication. However, engaging in such discussions does not imply approval of the young person's actions. Foster carers should never provide alcohol to children under 5 years old, and when considering this for older children, it is essential to discuss it in advance with the child's social worker and the child's parents to ensure that all parties are in agreement. Foster carers should encourage and support children to enjoy an alcohol-free childhood and to discourage drinking alcohol until adulthood.

If you suspect a child or young person has consumed alcohol, the response should depend on the amount they have consumed. Foster carers should never ignore a child or young person who appears to be drunk or under the influence of substances. Appropriate action should be taken to ensure their safety and well-being.

In the UK, alcohol consumption is governed by strict laws.

**It is illegal for:**

* Anyone under 18 years old to buy alcohol.
* Anyone under 18 years old to be sold alcohol.
* An adult to buy alcohol for someone under 18 years old.
* To give a child alcohol if they are under 5 years old.

**It is not illegal for:**

* A child aged 5 to 17 years old to drink alcohol at home or on other private premises.
* An adult to buy alcohol for a child aged 5 to 17 years old to drink at home or on other private premises.

However, The UK Chief Medical Officers (CMO) recommend that parents and carers should not allow their children to drink alcohol at home under the age of 15. Children and their parents and carers are advised that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option. It is also important to note that for some children in care, seeing adults with alcohol and drinking alcohol can be a frightening and worrying time for them, due to their prior experiences.

Foster carers do not need to be experts on drugs and substances, but it is important to respond competently and appropriately to young people in their care. All young people can be tempted to experiment with drugs, irrespective of their background. Substances refer to any materials, whether restricted or prohibited, that can have harmful effects on a child. These substances include aerosols, gas, glue, hallucinogenic mushrooms, petrol, solvents, amphetamines, barbiturates, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, hashish, heroin, as well as alcohol, cigarettes, and tobacco. In May 2016, the Psychoactive Substances Act made it illegal to sell or distribute substances intended to produce a "high”.

It can be challenging to tell if a young person is using drugs, especially when they are just starting or only experimenting occasionally. Some possible signs of drug abuse include changes in behaviour, mood, appearance, and school performance. Remember not to jump to conclusions but rather discuss your concerns with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker. Training and specialist support for drug and alcohol misuse are available, and accessing these services should be done in collaboration with the child's social worker. Foster carers can be held responsible for any illegal drugs found in their homes, so establishing clear boundaries is crucial.

Young people often have access to various domestic products that can be harmful and even fatal if inhaled. Vigilance around aerosol products, nail polish, correction fluid, glues, and other similar substances is necessary, especially when young people have a history of substance misuse or self-harm. The Fostering Service provides an e-learning course called: Drug and Alcohol Awareness for Parents and Carers.

Remember that not all young people will smoke, but for those who do, they can quickly become addicted to cigarettes. Foster carers should support young people in reducing or quitting smoking. If a young person already has a smoking habit, encourage them to seek assistance from the Looked After Children's Nurse or their GP. Foster carers should never buy cigarettes or tobacco products for children in care.

Key responsibilities include:

* Encouraging healthy behaviours
* Educating young people about the risks associated with substance misuse
* Monitoring and addressing concerns about alcohol, drugs, and smoking

E-cigarettes are not regulated as tobacco products or medicines in the UK. Foster carers should discourage children and young people from using e-cigarettes and should not purchase these for young people. Foster carers should also not use e-cigarettes in front of children and young people and should always set high standards of good role modelling behaviour and health.

Remember to maintain open communication with young people regarding alcohol, drugs, and smoking. Foster carers play a vital role in guiding them to make responsible and informed decisions about these issues.Top of Form

## **Identity**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 2 - Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

Understanding and promoting a child's identity is crucial when providing foster care. It's essential to recognise your own identity to identify any differences between you and the children you care for. By doing so, you can bridge any gaps that may arise. A child's identity can be composed of various elements. To support a child's identity, especially when they are not living with their biological family, is vital to prevent the weakening of their sense of self.

Cultural identity is a significant aspect of a child's heritage. Foster carers should respect and value a child's cultural heritage. Culture encompasses various factors such as language, racial identity, religion, and family attitudes. Conflicts may arise between your accustomed way of living and the child's. Foster carers should engage in open communication and understand the child's perspective, involving the child and their family (where appropriate). The fostering service offers additional training and support when children come from different backgrounds or cultures.

Language is an integral part of a child's identity and culture. Every effort should be made to preserve a child's linguistic and communication skills, as it's a part of their culture. If you need more information on a child's cultural and linguistic needs, consult with the child's social worker or your supervising social worker.

To promote a child's identity, you should discuss this with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker. This information can be essential if the child returns home or moves to another carer. Black and minority ethnic children have specific practical needs related to their identity, including hair and skin care. Foster carers should ensure that toys, educational materials, and other items reflect black culture and identity in a positive way.

Skin and hair care are crucial for Black and dual heritage children. The correct care should be taken to understand their specific needs and preferences. The child's religious upbringing is also important, and the right to determine the child's religion usually rests with the birth parents.

Children with disabilities have unique needs, and arrangements should be made to meet those needs while respecting their identity.

Some young people may identify as transgender or non-binary, and it's essential to support their gender identity and protect them from adverse effects.

Remember to consider the positive images and representations of different races and abilities in items like toys, books, and posters. This small but impactful step can contribute to a child's positive sense of identity.

## **Making Memories**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.

A child's history and background are essential for their sense of self and behaviour. However, children separated from their families may lack daily access to this information, making it harder for them to develop a strong sense of self and understand how the past influences their behaviours.

Foster carers play a crucial role in helping children and young people understand their backgrounds. You should record the story of the child's stay with you, including their experiences, milestones, and achievements. This information contributes to the child's Life Story and is particularly helpful for children who have been in foster care for an extended period.

## **Life Story Work**

Life Story work can take many different forms, often a book is created to provide an account of a child's life in words, pictures, and documents. It helps children make sense of their past and is coordinated by the child's social worker, involving foster carers, parents, relatives, and significant others. These books can be updated over time or additional books created as they get older. Life story can be through memory boxes or photo albums and should be kept specifically for the child, collecting meaningful items and mementos from their time in foster care. This information can be vital as a child progresses toward a permanent alternative family or adulthood. Foster carers are expected to help create these memory boxes and/or books for all children in their care, regardless of the amount of time spent with them, keeping drawings, photos, tickets from events and activities for example. Foster carers should share and pass this on to the child’s next carers.

## **Education and School**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 8 - Promoting Educational Attainment.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.
* Standard 6 - Keep children and young people safe from harm.

Children in care may have experienced disruptions in their education due to moves. These education disruptions can negatively impact their academic achievements and their ability to build friendships. Special funding, known as Pupil Premium, is provided to schools to support Children in care in enhancing their educational performance. To learn more about Pupil Premium, please consult the child's social worker or your Supervising Social Worker.

It is essential to discuss a child's educational arrangements and needs with the child's social worker and your Supervising Social Worker before the child comes to live with you.

You have an important role in promoting education, including early years and nursery, and providing a supportive learning environment in your home. Foster carers are to support learning at home, support positive engagement with the school e.g. attend parent’s evenings and meetings at the school and the expectation is that foster carers transport children to school, unless there are agreed exceptions to this.

**Personal Education Plans (PEP)**

Every child in care of compulsory school age must have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), even if they are not currently in education. The PEP ensures the right support is in place for the child to achieve their goals and should also document their leisure interests and educational achievements.

The child's social worker should organise the first PEP meeting within 10 days of the child becoming Looked After.

The PEP should encompass:

* Identified goals and targets.
* Details on who leads the target-setting process.
* Progress monitoring and action implementation.
* The completed PEP should be shared with you, the child, their parents, and other invited attendees. A copy should also be sent to the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.
* The child's social worker must ensure timely PEP review meetings occur, at least once per term.
* PEP decisions and recommendations must be conveyed to the child's Independent Reviewing Officer during the Looked After Review.
* Children in care are eligible for Pupil Premium funding, intended to enhance the academic performance of Children in care and narrow the attainment gap with their peers.
* The Pupil Premium for Children in care is managed by the Virtual School Head and is a crucial resource for supporting the child's Personal Education Plan.
* Changing a child's school is generally the responsibility of the child's social worker. Foster carers cannot change a child's school without appropriate reasons.
* Changing schools should be avoided, especially in the middle of a school year or during key years, except in unavoidable situations.
* Foster carers should receive a copy of the child's current PEP, and confidentiality should be respected as per the child's wishes.
* Special procedures apply when a child is in Key Stage 4. In this case, the operational lead for the children’s social worker would need to agree any change of school.
* If a girl becomes pregnant in your care, they should continue their education if possible, taking into account their wishes and the support of the school’s Designated Teacher for Looked After Children. This person who is suitably qualified is responsible for promoting the education of children in care, including those aged between 16 and 18 years old.
* Schools should promptly report to you and the child's social worker if the child is absent. Schools will work with you to address any attendance issues.

**Virtual School in Coventry**

Coventry Virtual School is a service provided by dedicated professionals whose work is to promote and co-ordinate educational support for Children in care and Care Leavers to succeed at nursery, school, college and university, wherever their place of learning.

Their purpose is to ensure that all who work with Coventry’s Children in care and Care Leavers have high educational aspirations for them, so that our pupils and students are given the best opportunities to engage, progress and achieve to their full potential.

The Virtual School does not exist in real terms as a building; children and young people do not actually attend. They remain the responsibility of the school at which they are enrolled.

However, Coventry Virtual School is staffed by professionals, who work in partnership with schools, social workers, carers and other professionals. Like all good parents, we ensure that communication about our children is regular and constructive and that we are all working together successfully to help them achieve their potential.

For further information about Coventry’s Virtual School, please click on the link: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/virtual-school>

**Exclusions from School**

Schools and other education providers should avoid using permanent and fixed-term school exclusion as far as possible for children and young people in the care system.​​

If your child is excluded from school, the Head Teacher, an education officer, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) adviser (if needed) should be invited to PEP meetings. Coventry’ Virtual School will also help and support if your foster child has been excluded. They can be contacted on 024 7697 5535 or virtualschool@coventry.gov.uk

If your child is excluded from school for a fixed period, the school will provide homework for the initial five days of the exclusion. After the fifth day, the school should provide a place for the child to continue their education.

**Educational, Health, Care Plan (EHCP)**

An Education, Health and Care Plan (also known as an ‘EHC plan’ or an ‘EHCP’) is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support.

EHC plans are legal documents that identify a young person’s educational, health and social care needs. Being in foster care does not automatically mean a young person will receive or need one, although many do.

As a foster carer, you can apply for an EHCP if you feel the child in your care is eligible. You should discuss this with the child’s social worker and your Supervising Social Worker.

For further information about ECH Plans and who is eligible and how to apply – please click on this link: <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help>

**Useful Information**

[Promoting the Education of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children)

[Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children (DfE)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked-after-children)

[Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)

[Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years: Statutory Guidance for Organisations who work with and Support Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25)Top of Form

## **Family Time (previously known as contact)**

Standards and Regulations

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:

* Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them.
* Standard 9 - Promoting and supporting contact.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Contact Between the Child and Their Family.

For many children, maintaining connections with family members, former caregivers, friends, and others is of great importance. Family time can be a significant factor in helping children form their identities and comprehend their life stories. Research suggests that preserving a child's ties to their family enhances the likelihood of them returning to their family home.

The terms of Family time with family and friends will be established in the Placement agreement. This plan will specify where, when, and how family time should occur, including whether it should be supervised and by whom. Family time can take place in the foster home or elsewhere, depending on what is in the best interest of all involved parties.

The child's social worker will supply you with essential information, including risk assessments for those involved in family time. Family time arrangements should be tailored to meet the child's needs. The child's welfare should be the top priority at all times. Gathering the child's needs, wishes, and feelings is also essential in family time planning, which may require using advocacy or other methods to understand the child's perspectives. Understanding how the child communicates with others, which may involve mobile phones, social networking sites, or gaming consoles like Xbox or PlayStation, can be useful in planning safe family time.

The Fostering Service, through your Supervising Social Worker, will offer practical guidance and support, including financial assistance when necessary, to ensure that contact is suitable and secure. Refer to the "Additional Allowances for Coventry Foster Carers" leaflet for details on financial help.

It is expected that foster carers will participate in transporting the children in their care to family time. This allows children to be with familiar individuals, reducing the need for them to interact with various professionals. While face-to-face meetings and visits are often the best ways to maintain relationships, alternative methods like letters, phone calls, video chat, photo exchanges, and cards can also be valuable.

It is especially important for children who do not share the same cultural background as their foster family to maintain connections with their family, friends, and community. This helps encourage, develop, and value their cultural history. It's not unusual for children to express a desire to reconnect with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with before becoming Looked After. When this occurs, consult the child's social worker.

Foster carers should add to their daily recording information about the child's behaviour and reactions before and after family time, as this may reveal patterns that inform future decisions. Discuss family time during your supervision meetings with your Supervising Social Worker to identify and, hopefully, resolve any issues.

Family time can provide a sense of security to a child when the people important to them feel comfortable with each other. This can also make parents and other family members less uncomfortable and threatened. Visits to the child's birth parents' home, including overnight stays, should be planned in advance, with the child's social worker coordinating these visits.

Sometimes, the child may appear anxious and upset after a visit, which may be due to various reasons. If you have any concerns, you should immediately inform the child's social worker. Working with birth parents is a crucial aspect of fostering, requiring trust and confidentiality. You may receive confidential information about the child's care, and you should consult with the Fostering Social Worker about what you can share and with whom. Confidentiality is important when discussing children in your care with other carers or seeking support.

Family time can be distressing for a child or young person, and you are often the one who must help them navigate their feelings of confusion, anger, or disappointment. You may also experience mixed emotions in such situations. Even when it appears that the child's family is letting them down, many reasons can contribute to this, which may result in seemingly inappropriate behaviour during family time. Understanding the parents' experience can provide valuable context for both the child and the family. Any restrictions on the child's communication with their parents should be agreed upon by the child's social worker and reviewed based on the child's wishes and feelings.

## **Life-Long Links**

Lifelong Links is a service that aims to build lasting relationships for care experienced young people in Coventry. It helps to bring together support networks, that can include people the young person knows well, but has not seen for a while (like a neighbour or a teacher), and even family members they have not yet met.

## **Family Group Conference (FGC)**

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a process in which families can be enabled to meet together, to find solutions to problems that they and their children are facing, within a professionally supportive framework. The FGC process involves all family members, friends and other adults who the family feel can contribute to making plans for the children.

## **Reunification Project**

The Reunification Project went live in the summer of 2021 and has so far seen over 20 children return home from long-term care. It puts children and families at the heart of practice using a creative 'high support, high challenge' model of work to return children home, where it is safe to do so.

The Reunification Team has been shortlisted for two national awards and its work has been showcased to other local authorities who are considering bringing in a similar way of working to help young people in care to return home.

## **Transport**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.
* Standard 6 - Keep children and young people safe from harm.

When transporting children in your care, they should be treated as part of the family and transported as you would your own children. Safety measures must be in place, including carrying a first aid kit and appropriate car seats where relevant. First aid kits should also be available during outdoor activities.

In the event of any road traffic accidents involving children in your care, immediate communication of the incident is essential. A written report should be provided to your Supervising Social Worker. Any driving penalties you receive must be reported.

Children traveling in cars must use the correct child car seat or booster seat, following the legal requirements. The same rules apply to children with disabilities unless a doctor exempts them on medical grounds. It is the driver's legal responsibility to ensure that the child is correctly restrained. You can use your child's car seat in the front seat of a vehicle if it complies with the manufacturer's instructions. Any frontal airbags must be deactivated before fitting a rear-facing baby seat.

You should take all necessary precautions to ensure everyone's safety while driving and always adhere to legal limits. Make sure your vehicle has the correct license, insurance that covers fostered children, tax, and MOT certificates. Evidence of these may be requested during the foster carer review process.

Consider taking toys, books, or tablet computers to keep younger children occupied on long journeys. If a child is very upset or unsettled before a journey, you should use your knowledge of the child to determine if the journey should proceed. If car journeys are a concern, raise it with your Supervising Social Worker for a risk assessment.

Car journeys can provide one-on-one time for children to express their feelings, free from direct eye contact. Foster carers may have positive conversations with children during these car rides.

You may be required to take children to meetings or visits with professionals or family members, which can lead to children becoming upset. In such cases, you should support the child and offer them the opportunity to talk about their feelings.

## **Overnight Stays with Friends**

Standards and Regulations

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.

Children in foster care should have opportunities for leisure activities such as sleepovers similar to other children their age, unless there is a good reason for this not to happen. Agreements about overnight stays should be reached with the child's social worker and parents during the placement process and recorded in the Placement Agreement, for a child to have a sleepover with a friend if appropriate supervision is available.

For overnight stays, foster carers should find out as much as possible about the people the child wishes to visit or stay with. It is good practice to speak to and see the parents of the child the young person wants to stay with, obtain their contact details, and ensure the child's safety.

Overnight stay arrangements should be clear and documented, including how the child will get to the location, sleeping arrangements, and the return plan. The decision to permit overnight stays should be based on factors like the child's safety and needs.

The child should have your contact details, know the plan for their return, and what to do if they decide to come home early. Depending on the child's age, discuss with them what information they want to share with the people they will be visiting.

Information should only be given on a "need to know" basis and recorded in the child's daily record. This may include health care needs, routines, and behaviour issues. If the child doesn't want certain information shared, they should be informed that this might affect whether they can stay overnight.

Record all decisions and arrangements in the child's daily record. Even if it is agreed that the child's social worker does not need to be consulted, inform them as soon as possible afterward. If the child is to stay away from placement with family members as part of family time arrangements, the child's social worker will make appropriate arrangements.

## **Becoming Independent**

Standards and Regulations

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

* Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare.

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards

* Standard 12 - Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care.

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

* Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.
* Standard 5 - Understand the development of children and young people.

See also:

* [The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf).
* [Care Leavers' Charter](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter).
* [DfE, Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2017)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers).
* [Coventry City Through Care: for Looked After Children and Care Leavers](https://www.coventry.gov.uk/childrens-social-care/care-leavers)

Foster children of all ages should be encouraged to develop skills that promote independence and take on responsibilities when they are capable of doing so. Foster Carers will receive training and support to help you provide effective guidance. Foster Carers can also access the Money Matters document, which offers further guidance and advice in this area, through this link: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/35588/leaving_care_guide_to_money_matters>

This section provides guidance on preparing young people for independence:

Foster carers should include opportunities for children to practice life skills such as cooking and cleaning in their daily routines.

Foster children should be involved in activities like supermarket shopping to learn the difference between the cost of convenience foods and fresh foods.

As children get older, they should be given responsibilities like paying for items using their pocket money or savings.

Preparing for independence involves developing skills related to personal care, safety, relationships, education, and employment.

Young people should be encouraged to develop self-esteem and resilience to prepare them for living independently.

Children who are eligible, relevant, or former relevant (based on specific definitions) must undergo a multi-agency assessment of their needs regarding leaving care. The assessment is coordinated by the young person's social worker and should be completed before they reach the age of 18.

The assessment includes educational and employment arrangements, support, and accommodation plans, as well as financial help.

Foster carers play a role in preparing and reviewing the young person's Leaving Well Plan, which will replace their Care Plan. The Leaving Well Plan covers key areas related to the young person's transition to independence.

Training and support are available for foster carers to help develop independence in young people.

Personal Advisers are appointed to support young people once they turn 18, providing advice and assistance up to the age of 25. They help with the assessment, planning, and review of services, and offer support and guidance.

Good planning and preparation are needed to support the young person's transition to independence. Foster carers should be familiar with the opportunities and support available for care leavers.

Local authorities must provide information about the possibility of extending a young person's living arrangements when they turn 18.

Discussions should take place to determine the best living arrangements for the young person, whether that involves staying with foster carers, becoming a Staying Put Carer, House Project, Shared Lives or finding another suitable place to live. See below for further details.

## **Staying Put**

Staying Put is an arrangement for Coventry care leavers who were in foster care, to continue living with their former foster carers once they reach 18, until they are ready to move out and live independently or reach the age of 21 and potentially up to the age of 25 if they stay in education. Where this is agreed, the arrangement ensures the young adult can experience a transition similar to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to successfully manage their independence when they do move on. Staying Put supports young people in their community, family life and home, and avoids the premature and often unsuccessful move into living on their own too soon. For further information please use this link to access Coventry’s Staying Put policy: <https://coventrychildcare.proceduresonline.com/files/staying_put_policy.pdf>

## **Shared Lives**

Shared Lives offers adults the opportunity to live with approved Carers in ordinary family homes, experiencing all the advantages, joys and sometimes difficulties of family life. Shared Lives has a forward-thinking team who are passionate about matching the needs of adults with Carers that can offer a family home and a safe, nurturing environment. We offer a person-centred approach to care.

For further information please use this link to access Coventry’s Shared Lives: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/sharedlives>

## **House Project**

Coventry’s pioneering House Project was launched as part of a national programme in 2021 and supports young people as they build confidence and gain independence while living in their own home.

Through Care run the house project for 16 and 17 year olds, with Citizen Housing to identify suitable properties and a group of around 12 young people are then given the chance to move in and learn about day-to-day tasks such as cooking, money and bills, personal safety, and finding out how to shop smartly. The young people commit to completing a course focusing on independence, budgeting and other life skill, with a view of securing their own tenancy. They are also helped to build links with local employers and training providers, attend conferences, hear from guest speakers and even raise money for the homeless.

On completing their year successfully, the young people have a graduation ceremony before taking their next steps towards independence.