

## Section 2 – Fostering for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering

### 2.1 The Foster Care Agreement

When you start fostering with Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering you sign the Foster Care Agreement, which is based on the requirements set out in Schedule 5 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The agreement outlines what is expected of you as a foster carer in fostering for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering.

The Foster Care Agreement also sets out what Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering undertakes to provide by way of support, training and other arrangements.

Following approval you will be sent a pack containing two copies of the Foster Care Agreement, you are required to sign both copies. You retain one copy and the other is kept on your file at Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering.

*See Appendix D – Foster carers Agreement (Copy)*

### 2.2 The Fostering Task

Foster carers are expected to provide foster care in line with the National Minimum Standards. The Agency has incorporated the National Minimum Standards into its own document Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Standards for Foster Carers which foster carers are expected to operate within. The fostering task will vary according to the type of placement and the needs of individual children.

#### ***Key tasks for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers:***

- Providing a high quality standard of care
- Providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment
- Having a child centred approach
- Safeguarding the child's or young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare
- Recognising and addressing the child's or young person's needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality
- Promoting the child's or young person's health and educational achievement
- Providing stability in the lives of children and young people to enable them to achieve their full potential
- Working closely with the child's or young person's family and encouraging contact with family and friends (where appropriate)
- Providing support and guidance to young people preparing to leave care
- Working as part of a team of professionals
- Participating in ongoing training and support group meetings

## 2.3 Approval, review and termination of approval

### Approval of foster carers

*Each foster carer is subject to, and participates in, a comprehensive assessment of his/her ability to carry out the fostering task and must be formally approved by the Fostering Panel before a child or young person is placed in his or her care.*

(Standard 13 of the UK National Standards for Foster Care)

### The Approval process

All Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers undergo a full assessment by a qualified assessor using the BAAF Form F before being presented to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Panel for approval. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Decision Maker who decides whether the applicant should be approved.

### Foster carer's agreement and register of foster carers

You will have received a letter and agreement from the Agency notifying you that you have been approved as foster carers for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering and that your name has been added to the Register of Foster Carers.

The agreement states the terms and conditions of approval i.e. number and age range of children, type of placement, any restrictions or particular circumstances.

The Agency maintains a register of all carers approved by them in accordance with the Regulation 31 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

### Review of approval – foster carer's annual review

#### *Purpose*

Regulation 29 of the Fostering Services Regulations require Channels and Choices to satisfy itself that foster carers continue to meet the required standards and set out arrangements for reviewing approval.

#### *When?*

The approval of each foster carer should be reviewed in the following circumstances:

- Annual Review – at least every 12 months or earlier if the Agency considers it necessary
- Following a serious complaint, allegation of abuse, significant change of circumstances or other problem
- At the foster carers request

You will receive a questionnaire from the registered manager to complete prior to a visit from an independent Reviewing Officer. You can request assistance from your Supervising Social Worker to complete the questionnaire and then the completed report should be returned to the registered manager at the office.

#### *Who contributes?*

Others involved in the placement are informed that the review is taking place and are invited to write down their comments:

- Sons and daughters of foster carers
- Children/young people in placement
- Local Authority Social Workers who have placed children with you
- Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Supervising Social Worker
- Birth Parents
- Any therapist involved with the foster child/family
- Fostered Children's School
- Any other relevant professional

#### *What happens at the review?*

Key information relating to the foster home is updated on the Review Form and any particular action that needs to be taken is noted:

- Significant changes to the household
- Statutory checks including with Disclosure and Barring Service
- Unannounced visits carried out by Supervising Social Workers
- Health & Safety
- Placements of children/young people

The focus of discussion at your review meeting is your experience of fostering over the year and its impact on you and your family. It is your opportunity to discuss what you think you have achieved, any problems, the support provided by Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering and supervision agreements.

The review is also an opportunity to plan for the following year e.g. your training and development needs, what kind of fostering best suits you and your family, and what kind of placements you are able to offer.

#### *The written report*

At the end of the review the Independent Reviewing Officer prepares a written report stating:

- If the foster carers continues to be suitable to act as a foster carer to any child in respect of whom approval is given and the carer and their household continues to be suitable

and

- Whether the terms and approval continue to be appropriate (Regulation 29 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011).

#### *Referral to the fostering panel*

The review report from all reviews are referred to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Panel for consideration. The Foster Carers are required to attend their first Annual Review and will be invited to attend subsequent reviews.

#### *Decision on continuing approval and changes to terms of approval*

The review report and any recommendations arising from referral to the Fostering Panel are passed to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Decision Maker who is responsible for making decisions on the approval of foster carers. The Agency will write to you after the review confirming the continuation of your approval and any changes to the terms of your approval.

This notification will also invite foster carers to make any written representations within 28 days (see 2.5 Representations against refusal or approval).

#### *Termination of approval*

Circumstances leading to termination - In a few situations Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering may decide that foster carers are no longer suitable to care for a particular child, or should not continue to foster at all.

Approval may be terminated following a review or following concern, serious complaints or allegations. An investigation may have been carried out under Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering's Child Protection Policy and Procedures or Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering's Policy and Procedures in relation to allegations and complaints against foster carers.

Process for terminating approval - Fostering agencies must follow the process set out in Regulation 29 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

All circumstances where termination of approval or changes to terms of approval are being considered are referred to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Panel. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Decision Maker who has responsibility for the final decision.

If Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering decides that the foster carer or household are no longer suitable, the Agency will write to the foster carer(s) informing them of the decision, giving reasons and specifying a date from which approval is to be terminated.

This notification will also invite foster carers to make any written representations within 28 days (see Representations against refusal or approval). This can be to either to Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering or to the Independent Review Mechanism

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering will offer to arrange a personal visit by a Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering representative and will make sure that the foster carers(s) are aware of the Complaints and Representations Procedure.

## **2.4 The fostering panel**

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering is required to set up a fostering panel under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

### **Who's on the panel?**

The Panel is made up of people with broad experience from a range of backgrounds. It should include members of both sexes and reflect different racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

It includes foster carers of Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering, the medical advisor to Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering and independent members appointed from foster carers, people who have been fostered and people with relevant professional experience.

The chair of the Panel is someone with considerable experience of the needs of children/young people and fostering and is independent of Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering.

### **What does it do?**

Under Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services Regulations the Fostering Panel:

- Makes recommendations on the approval, terms of approval, review of approval and termination of foster carers to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Decision Maker
- Advises on the procedures for carrying out Foster Carer's Reviews
- Oversees the conduct of assessments
- Advises on professional standards, childcare practices and any other issues the Agency Decision Maker may wish them to consider

### **How does it affect me?**

You will probably already have met your Panel when you were approved as foster carers. The Panel will see the Review reports from your first review and may see subsequent reports if there are particular issues affecting your approval or terms of approval. There may be occasions when you will be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel to discuss a particular issue and put your point of view.

### **Confidentiality**

Foster carers are given the opportunity to read the non-confidential sections of any reports and to add any information or clarification. They will not be able to see any other documentation, particularly references, where confidentiality needs to be maintained.

All members of the Panel agree to abide by strict confidentiality rules.

## **2.5 Representations against termination or change of terms**

This section covers representation against refusal of approval, termination of approval, the terms of approval and changes in terms of approval.

### **What to do if approval is to be terminated or terms changed**

If Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Panel recommends that already approved foster carers are no longer suitable to foster or that, contrary to the views of the foster carers, the terms of approval (number, age range and needs of children/young people to be placed) should be revised, then the foster carer's are invited to submit written representation to Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering's Agency Decision Maker.

Again this is a distinct process from using the Representations and Complaints Procedure and is covered by Regulation 29, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

### **When can representations and complaints procedure be used?**

The Representation and Complaints Procedure can only be used if the agency's decision is not to reapprove foster carers, or to insist on a revision of approval and the foster carers are of the view that there has been some identifiable gap or omission in procedure or process.

## **2.6 Resignation**

Talk to your Supervising Social Worker.

If you think that you may not want to continue fostering for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering, it's best if you talk to your Supervising Social Worker at the earliest opportunity. Depending on the reasons behind your decision, it may be possible to sort things out so that you are happy to continue fostering.

### **Put it in writing**

If you no longer wish to act as foster carers, you must give written notice to Channels and Choices Therapeutic fostering, your approval is terminated 28 days after Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering receives your resignation

### **How long does it take?**

The approval is terminated after 28 days of receipt of the notice.

### **Notifying the local authority**

The Agency has to notify the placing local authority of your resignation and your name will be removed from the Register of Foster Carers.

### **We would like to know why you are resigning**

The Agency will be interested to find out from you your reasons for ceasing to foster for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering.

## **2.7 Transferring to another fostering agency**

### **Giving notice**

If you are considering transferring to another agency you must give written notice of your intention to transfer to another fostering agency. Under no circumstances should an assessment by another agency begin before notice is given.

Foster carers can only be approved by one fostering agency at any one time (Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 Regulation 28.1).

### **Planning for children currently being fostered**

The situation of children currently being fostered by you needs to be carefully managed and negotiated with the placing local authority and the other fostering agency. Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering will positively facilitate the arrangements.

### **Transfer of carers' protocol for 'movement of carers between agencies'**

Fostering agencies in the UK and the Fostering Network have agreed to follow the good practice set out in the following protocol for movement of carers between agencies.

The transfer of carers' protocol is based on the assumption that carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services; and the principle that, in all circumstances, the welfare of any child in placement must be paramount.

Should a carer wish to move to a new provider it is recommended that the following guidelines be observed.

1. Where there is no child in placement the carer must give written notice of their intention to transfer to another agency, as specified in the Fostering Service Regulations (England & Wales), to the existing fostering provider. The recruiting fostering provider may begin assessment once the written notice is given.

2. The recruiting provider will notify the foster carer's existing provider of their intention to start an assessment and request a reference. On receipt of that request the existing provider will give the recruiting provider a comprehensive written reference within 28 days.
3. Where there is a child or children in placement, carers must give written notice of their intention to be assessed by another fostering agency, to the existing provider and the placing authority. Upon receipt of the written notice the placing authority shall within 28 days convene and hold a meeting of:
  - the placing authority/authorities\*, the existing provider,
  - the recruiting provider and the carer(s).

**NB** Foster carers agree to follow this protocol when they sign the Foster Care Agreement

\* Where there is more than one placing authority, they will agree which authority will take responsibility for convening the meeting. The meeting will consider the following:

- How a move of carer to another provider may affect each child in placement.
- How the child's plan will be followed.
- The circumstances in which the recruiting provider may use any other placement /vacancy.
- The arrangements for approval by the recruiting provider and de-registration by the existing provider of the carer(s), to facilitate transfer and continuity for the carer.
- The views of the child, parent or any other interested parties should be sought and represented by the placing authority.

**The aim of the meeting must be to reach agreement on the following:**

- Continuing the placement with the carers where it is in the child/children's best interest
- Where the placement is not to continue, the arrangements to move the child/children to an alternative placement.
- A timetable for the transfer of approval to the recruiting provider. The expectation is that reassessment and training will take place and that this will be completed within 3 – 6 months of the meeting taking place. There will be occasions when this timescale cannot reasonably be adhered to. In such cases, carers will be kept informed about developments and the anticipated time to completion.

### **Fees charged by independent fostering providers**

In the case of a transfer of a carer from one independent fostering provider to another, the existing placement charge to the local authority will be honoured by the recruiting provider, subject to the recruiting provider's agreed annual inflation linked increases.

### **Payment to carers**

Where it is agreed that the child's placement will continue with the carer approved by the recruiting provider the existing rate of allowances and fees should remain the same as a



minimum. These rates should continue to apply for the duration of the placement subject to annual inflation linked increases.

## **2.8 Sons and daughters of foster carers**

### **Involving your children**

If they are old enough, you will hopefully have involved your children at the start of your “fostering career” in your decision to foster. Your children also need to be included in decisions related to your role as foster carers and day to day family life because their feelings and reactions can have a major impact on the foster placement.

### **Impact of fostering on your children**

Most sons and daughters of foster carers benefit enormously from the experience of fostering but there are times when it can be difficult for foster carers to balance the needs of their own children and those of fostered children.

Where this happens, the Agency will, as set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 (NMS 23.7), give specific consideration to ensuring any help and support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers is provided when appropriate.

### **Placements**

Before a placement is made, both you and the Social Worker should consider the needs and ages of your own children. Research shows that there is a higher risk of placements coming to an end when foster carer’s have a child under five, or have children or young people of a similar age to the child or young person placed.

### **Managing behaviour**

It can be difficult to explain to your children why a foster child’s behaviour is being treated in a particular way, especially if this is different from the way they are treated.

Your children may find it hard to understand why foster children “get away with things” that they would not be allowed to do or apparently “get treats” from their Social Worker when their behaviour has been bad.

It can take time and a lot of patience to help your children understand these things but in the long run they will gain considerably by understanding the experiences of some children and how they can be part of helping a child or young person come through these.

### **What support does Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering offer?**

Your Supervising Social Worker and the Therapeutic Team offers advice and support to all members of your family and will be pleased to discuss any questions or concerns of your own children or young people. They may well see them on their own from time to time.

In addition, the Agency or foster carers themselves, are sometimes able to arrange support groups or training specifically for the sons and daughters of foster carers. If you identify a particular need, it's best if you talk to your Supervising Social Worker about it.

Family Members will be given the opportunity to attend Social Events organised by the Company.

## **2.9 Diary & record keeping and confidentiality**

It is most important that foster carers respect the confidential and sensitive information about children and their families, both in the written documents they receive and keep, as well as in receiving and passing on information verbally.

The events occurring during any period that a child spends in the foster home must also be recorded and notes provided for the placing Social Worker.

Your diary and your daily log is a valuable piece of life history for the child and where appropriate, children should be encouraged to participate in keeping a record of their stay. The diary remains the property of the child and should be returned to the Channels and Choices Offices at the end of each placement. It is always worth considering that one day the young person may read what has been written so due care should be exercised when writing about incidents which may have been difficult for them.

### **The Data Protection Act**

This Act requires that no records of children are stored on computer or on a disk that is not encrypted. However a computer can be used like a typewriter to produce records or reports. The document can only be saved to the encrypted data stick that Channels and Choices have provided you with.

### **The Access to Personal Files Act (1987)**

This Act says that we all have the right to see the information kept about us. Foster carers therefore also have access to their personal files and records that are kept about them, with the exception of information given in confidence by third parties i.e. personal references etc.

One person is not entitled to see information about another person and this includes family members. Children must also therefore have their own records. Parents are not entitled to see the file or record of their child unless this is in the child's best interest. The third party rule stated previously would also apply with children's files.

It is therefore required that the diaries issued to foster carers are only used for appointments etc. and NOT as a place to keep records on a child.

### **Managing confidentiality**

Information that you have about a child, his/her history and family background can only be shared with others on the basis that they have an absolute “need to know”. If in doubt, check with your Social Worker about the information you can share with others.

### **Confidentiality**

Foster carers who keep confidential information or written reports in connection with fostering or the child/young person should take great care to ensure that they are not accessible to others, information should be held in a secure locked cabinet/box

### **Keeping information safely**

During a child’s placement you will also collect valuable information and mementos of the child’s stay. Photographs should be taken regularly, especially on occasions like birthdays, visits from family or friends, special events at school etc. This provides an invaluable record for the child in later life. It is best to keep them in a series of albums for the child, dated and labelled with details of the event. Many children in the public care system are at risk of growing up without this sort of basic history of their childhood, especially if they move through a number of different placements.

School reports, birthday cards, party invitations, certificates, samples of school work etc. should all be kept safely for the child in later life. Date and note the significance of each item as you put it into storage. Even a series of large envelopes, one for each year, can be a precious record for the future.

### **Foster carer’s records**

Fostering Services Regulation 32 requires the Agency to hold the following records on all of its foster carers. See Section 11.4 “Your right to see your file and how to go about it”.

#### **Why foster carers need to keep records on foster children**

- Evidence for Court Proceedings
- A record of the child’s life in foster care
- To monitor and measure change in the child
- To aid assessment, reports for Reviews, Action Records etc.
- To protect the carer and their family
- As a record of parental and other contact
- To record significant events, positive as well as negative
- To aid in Life Story work

#### **Guidance regarding what and how foster carers make recordings on each child**

The record is the property of the Agency and should be shared with the Supervising Social Worker and placed with the Social Worker during placement. If you are concerned that there may be future allegations of complaints from a specific child it is recommended the carer retains a copy of the record; this should be negotiated with the Supervising Social Worker, during, or, at the end of the placement.

Daily recordings about a child are entered directly onto Charms by foster carers and then uploaded into each individual child's electronic file. Weekly and monthly summaries should be typed on computer and saved onto the encrypted USB memory stick that you have been supplied with. The memory stick must be locked away in a secure cabinet.

Foster carers should record facts and observations and state when they are giving an opinion. The foster carer who observes or hears the event should preferably be the one to record it on the child's record. In all cases the individual day's record should be dated and signed as soon as possible after the event. If a foster carer writes what someone else has told them that they have seen or heard, this is hearsay in a Court of Law and may have less weight as evidence.

Foster carers are advised not to use jargon, to be specific and say what the behaviours were and the context in which they occurred. Foster carers should write in a way that explains/gives details of behaviours e.g. not "Susan was disruptive today" but rather explain, "Susan came home from school today and broke two of her favourite toys (her computer game and Paddington Bear) because she had been told off by the teacher for talking in class when she should have been listening to the lesson". Foster carers are advised to always think what the words may mean to the child or young person when he or she may read them in five, ten or even fifty years' time.

For all placements a daily record will need to be kept. If you are unclear about what is expected please speak with your Supervising Social Worker.

Foster carers should be advised that if the information they record follows a disclosure of some form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, it is crucial that they record the information within the same guidelines, using the child's own words i.e. not interpreted into the words of the foster carer. Foster carers should inform the Agency Child Protection Officer or Duty Worker immediately. This information could leave this child or other children at risk if it is not shared with those who have a duty to investigate such concerns. It is not your, or the foster carer's role to determine truth or otherwise in this situation.

Foster carers are advised not to leave bits of information out that they feel might be painful for the child to read. Decisions will be made at the time relevant to the child's age and development as to what would be appropriate for them to see at that particular time. Someone would then go through the information with them. They are not just handed their file to read at will. All our lives are made up of different experiences and varying emotions. Many of the children we work with are unclear as to why they have been fostered and for many it becomes very important for them to establish this. Others will have a need to preserve a fantasy about their past. It is unlikely that these children or adults would request to see their files.

Foster carers are required to keep all recordings in a safe, secure place.

## **2.10 Equality in the recruitment, assessment, approval, training and support of foster carers**

- a. Anyone fostering for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering is considered primarily on the basis of his/her ability to provide appropriate care for a child/young looked after in public care. Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers against the competencies identified within the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Form F assessment format (BAAF 2009), the ability of applicants to demonstrate these or to evidence the potential for achieving them.
- b. Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering has a responsibility to recruit and retain a range of foster carers from diverse backgrounds who are able, with training and support, to meet the physical, emotional, racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of children/young people needing placement as well as any needs relating to disability, gender or sexuality.
- d. In order to achieve or maintain a sufficiently diverse pool of foster carers and to provide appropriate placements for children or young people in care, Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering may engage in specifically targeted recruitment activities.
- e. All Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers receive post-approval training on diversity and equality with specific information about how best to meet the needs of children/young people in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Any enquirer or applicant having clear discriminatory values and attitudes would not be considered suitable as a foster carer for Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering. Conversely any existing Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carer who displays values, attitudes and behaviour at odds with promoting equality and diversity will find his/her continued approval is called into question and this may result in a formal review of their approval.
- g. Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers who are caring for a child or young person whose racial, cultural or religious background is different to their own will receive additional information, support and training to help them promote a positive understanding of and pride in the child/young person in relation to his/her heritage. In such situations the child or young person may receive separate support in order to promote his/her self-esteem and sense of identity.
- h. The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) identify a range of parameters along which the welfare of a

child or young person should be safeguarded and promoted, i.e. protection from abuse, promoting contact with family and friends, involvement in decision-making, promoting health and development, promoting educational achievement and preparation for adulthood. Pre and post-approval foster carer training and support will reinforce these responsibilities of the agency's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity, producing the best possible outcomes for children and young people who are looked after and improving their life chances.