

Section 8 - Making a Positive Contribution

Key Outcomes

Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

(Standard 2 & 3 of National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, 2011)

8.1 Policy

It is Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering's policy to create a climate of openness in their work with children and young people and work in partnership with their families which will enable children and young people to engage in making positive life choices and decision making that affects their lives.

This work will include promoting the aims and principles of *Every Child Matters*. That is:

- Supporting and engaging in the community and environment
- Engaging in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school
- Developing positive relationships and choosing not to bully and discriminate
- Developing self-confidence and successfully dealing with significant life changes and challenges, and
- Developing enterprising behaviour

are aspirations we want all of our children and young people to achieve and view as their preferred choice as they grow and develop.

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering and its foster carers will ensure they:

- Provide foster carers with support to enable them to promote children's social and emotional development, and enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- Provide foster carers with support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour.
- Work in partnership with the child's Social Worker and local authority to ensure that children's opinions and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues which are likely to affect their daily life and future.
- Follow up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority.

- Minimise the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and thus avoid criminalising children unnecessarily.

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers and foster carers will both:

- Work in partnership with the child's Social Worker and local authority to ensure that children's opinions and those of their families and others significant to the child are sought over all issues which are likely to affect their daily life and future.
- Understand the importance of listening to the views of children in their care and are trained and supported in listening and responding to children's views.
- Encourage children and young people to express their wishes and feelings about their needs and the care they receive on a regular basis.
- Use children and young people's preferred method of communication and arrange specialist support for children with communication difficulties, if necessary.
- Ensure that children and young people know how to raise concerns and help them to successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges.
- Ensure children and young people have access to a complaints procedure.

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers will:

- Provide children and young people with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity.
- Provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour.
- Help children to develop and practice skills to build and maintain positive relationships, be assertive and to resolve conflicts positively.
- Encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities.
- Respect the child's privacy and confidentiality, in a manner that is consistent with good parenting.
- Develop positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.
- Ensure they are aware of all the necessary information available to Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help them understand, predict and support the child's needs and behaviours within their household.

8.2 Engage in decision making and support the community and environment

Whenever adults make a decision which will affect looked after children the child or young person has the right to give their opinion and to have it taken into account according to their age and maturity.

(Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Legal background

The Children Act 1989 enshrines in childcare legislation the two key principles of:

- Working in partnership with parents and with the child or young person
- Participation of parents and children and young people in decision making processes; in particular, ascertaining the “wishes and feelings” of the child in any decision made about their life.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulations 11 and 18) place duties on fostering service providers to give consideration to the child’s wishes and feelings in light of his age and understanding in any decision and to establish a complaints and representation procedure accessible to children and young people.

See Standards of Practice for Foster Carers (Standard 4) Appendix A

Consulting children and young people and their families policy

Partnership with families

It is important that families are kept informed of progress and any concerns or incidents in relation to their child. Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers and foster carers should work closely with the child’s Social Worker to ensure that they are consulted and involved in decisions about the child’s future consistent with the care plan and placement agreement.

The involvement of parents and those with parental responsibility will vary according to the legal situation (i.e. whether the child is accommodated or subject to a care order) and the individual circumstances and care plan.

In general, parents should be consulted and informed on the following:

Consult child’s parents on:	Inform child’s parents of:
Medical and dental treatments and examinations including specialist appointments.	Injury, illness or accident to child or young person.
Choice of School, choice of subjects for examinations, decisions about leaving school.	Allegations of abuse.

Young person's lifestyle e.g. dramatic haircuts, body piercing, tattoos.	Progress at school/absences from school.
Changes to the child's care plan.	Significant incidents e.g. involvement in offending behaviour, aggressive behaviour.
Choice of work, future education and training.	Problems being experience by child or young person with young person's consent.
Pathway Plan for leaving care.	

The child's Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker should be clear about whose responsibility it is to do the above.

Working with the child or young person's Social Worker

The child's Local Authority Social Worker is the main contact with the child or young person's family although there may be close contact between the foster carers and Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers with the parents especially where Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering is providing a comprehensive support package.

It is important that the Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker have a clear agreement about who is leading on what issues with the family.

The child's Social Worker also has a key role in seeking the child or young person's views and ensuring that they are taken into account especially in relation to the child's care and treatment in the foster home.

The child's Social Worker carries out statutory visits. Foster carers and Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers should ensure that a child or young person's request for visits by their Social Worker is followed up.

The child's Social Worker works closely with the Channels and Supervising Social Worker and foster carers to ensure that any concerns that the child or young person has are addressed.

The child's independent reviewing officer co-ordinates with the child's Social Worker regarding their care plan. *(See 4.3 Care Planning and Statutory Reviews)*

Informing and communicating with children and young people - a right to Information

Children and young people have a right of access to most of the information about themselves, to express their views and to have their views taken into account.

The Local Authority also has an obligation to make sure that information is presented in such a way that children and young people can understand.

At the beginning of the placement, the young person should be given information about the foster family and placement and subject to age and understanding will participate in the Placement Agreement Meeting.

A Young Person's Guide to Fostering

Each child or young person fostered by foster carers is given a copy of 'A Young Person's Guide to Fostering'. This will be given to them at the beginning of the placement.

Communication

It is important that children and young people are able to express their wishes and feelings about their needs and the care they receive and are able to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

Foster carers and foster carers need to be proactive in regularly asking the child or young person for their views. Foster carers and foster carers should also ensure that communication is undertaken at the pace of the child or young person and in an environment that is comfortable for the child.

Some children and young people will need help in expressing themselves and re-assurance that it is safe to do so.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to arrange for a young person to have a friend or adult supporter or to involve an external advocacy services to help the young person put over their views.

Involvement in decision making

Children and young people should be encouraged to attend any meeting about themselves (e.g. Child Protection Case Conferences, Reviews and Planning Meetings, meetings at school), where every effort will be made to help them express their needs, wishes and feelings.

Foster carers and Social Workers should encourage the active participation of the child or young person in the Placement Agreement Meeting in drawing up the Placement Agreement and in the Child Care Review.

Children with communication difficulties or disabilities or whose first language is not English

Particular attention should be paid to the needs of children with disabilities, communication difficulties or whose first language is not English.

The child's preferred method of communication (e.g. Braille, Makaton, BSL or Picture Boards) should be used to help the child express themselves.

If the use of an interpreter is needed, particularly if English is not the child's first language, independent interpreters should be used and not members of the child's family.

If necessary, specialists should be consulted. The Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering Medical Advisor may be able to help with knowledge of specialist resources.

Children with disabilities might wish to seek help from an independent group of disabled people.

Training and support for foster carers

The importance of listening to children and young people is covered in the preparation and assessment of foster carers. In addition, Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering expects foster carers to regularly seek the views of children and young people and to address any concerns that they might have. (See Section 3.4 Training and Development of Foster Carers and Standard 4, Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering standards of practice for foster carers)

Representations and complaints procedure

Children and young people are informed that they have access to the Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering complaints procedure for children and young people. This is explained to them at the Placement Information Meeting at the beginning of their placement and information is included in 'A Young Person's Guide to Fostering'.

Where a child or young person has concerns about their care in the foster home they should be encouraged to discuss it with their local authority Social Worker on their next visit or if urgent, the Social Worker should be contacted to visit earlier.

They should be advised/given help to look at the Representations and Complaints Procedure for advice on how to resolve their concerns informally and what to do if they wish to make a formal complaint.

8.3 Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully and discriminate

Promoting positive relationships

Many young people who have been in care find it difficult to make relationships and can end up with traumatic experiences when they leave care or being isolated or lonely. The experience of being in a foster family provides the opportunity for personal development, a period of stability and for any special help.

Foster carers and other family members and friends may be able to help a young person relate to other people by:

- Encouraging the young person to make friends with young people outside the care system e.g. through school, college, or local youth clubs and leisure activities.
- Helping disabled young people to access mainstream leisure activities to build up a wider friendship network.
- Encouraging the young person to develop friendships with suitable adults outside the care system, e.g. volunteer adult befrienders.
- Continuing to take an interest in the young person even when the placement has ended.
- Encouraging parents to stay in touch.
- Helping young people from ethnic minorities to have contact with adults and young people from their own cultural backgrounds and with youth clubs or voluntary organisations set up for people from their culture.
- Helping with sexual education and sexual relationships (where agreed that it is appropriate for the foster carers to be doing this).

Contact with family & significant others

Policy

It is the policy of the Agency to promote, facilitate and enable contact between foster children and their families, relatives and friends where it is in the child's best interests to do so and it is in accordance with the law.

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering recognises the importance of helping children and young people to maintain family links and continue important relationships even where the child is unlikely to return home.

The Agency will support the crucial role that foster carers have to play in promoting contact and will work closely with children and young people and their families, foster carers and the child's Social Worker in making suitable arrangements for contact.

Procedures

Matching & placements

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering takes into account the needs of the child or young person for contact with their family and friends in making the decision about a suitable placement.

Risk assessment

The child or young person's Social Worker carries out a risk assessment. No contact should take place until the risk assessment has been carried out (except where an overriding requirement exists e.g. a Court order) and arrangements have been made for any supervision that is needed.

The purpose of the risk assessment is to determine whether there are any risks to the child or young person or foster carers.

Responsibility for making decisions about contact

The Local Authority makes the decision about contact arrangements for a child or young person in care, subject to any Court order in force e.g. a contact order.

Where a child is accommodated, decisions will be made as a result of negotiations and agreement between all the parties.

Information for children on bullying

All children and young people receive a copy of the 'A young person's guide to fostering' when they are first placed with foster carers. This contains useful information for them on the subject of bullying. Foster carers should encourage their child(ren) to read this or to read and explain it to them if they are unable to do so themselves.

8.4 Helping young people develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges

Enabling young people to develop their self-esteem

Young people in care need encouragement to value themselves, to understand their family history and the experience of being in care and to be able to explain it to others.

Foster carers can help young people by:

- Ensuring young people have an understanding of their family background and all aspects of their cultural and individual identity.
- Helping them understand how they came to be cared for.
- Presenting the child's individual identity and cultural background in a positive light.
- Assisting with Life Story Books.
- Facilitating contact with positive role models.
- Giving disabled young people information about their impairment and advice support and information about tackling disabling barriers.

All preparation for leaving care and providing after care must take account of the religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and other needs of the child.

Disabled young people may face more barriers than other young people and may also have needs specifically related to impairment. It is essential to ensure that these needs are met when preparing young people to leave care and in the arrangements for after care.

Life story work

What is a life story book?

A life story book (or life book) is an account of a child or young person's life in words, pictures, photographs and documents, made by the child or young person with the help of a trusted adult. The trusted adult could be a foster carer, a local authority Social Worker, and a member of Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers or another identified individual.

Why is life story work so important?

Life story books help children understand their past which forms an important part of their identity. When children and young people lose track of their past it makes them feel unimportant and they may find it difficult to develop emotionally and socially.

Life story work provides a structured way for a child or young person to find out about and make sense of their past. A life story book is also a record for a child who may have experienced many moves.

All children and young people are entitled to a full picture of their past and their family even though this may at times be painful.

Black children and young people (including those of dual heritage) have a right to know about their racial and cultural background especially if they are placed with a white family and to understand the origins of racism. If a black child is placed with a white family, life story work may be best done by a black person working closely with the foster carer.

What should go in it?

The life story book should include information about where the child or young person was born, information about mum, dad, brothers and sisters, grandparents, other significant people e.g. previous foster carers, details about where he/she has lived, gone to nursery or school, significant events in their life, things they have experienced, in fact anything that has contributed to making that child or young person who they are today.

A life story book will consist of pictures, photographs, maps, memories, cards, letters and so on and will involve the child or young person as much as he/she wishes.

Starting life story work

Sharing difficult and painful memories with a child or young person, enabling them to talk about them and helping them to make sense of the many moves and losses they may have experienced requires great sensitivity and understanding on the part of the person working with the child.

Usually before life story work is begun there will be careful planning by the child or young person's Social Worker, foster carer and other significant people (e.g. Teacher). The life story work may be conducted in partnership an Independent Therapist.

You should not start life story work without first having discussed it with your Channels and Supervising Social Worker.

Questions?

- Who is the most appropriate person to work with the child?
- How will the information for the book be collected e.g. history, photo's?
- When and where will the life story work be done?
- How will any issues arising from the work be followed up?

Supporting the child or young person

You may notice a change in behaviour in the child or young person once the work has begun. Many children and young people become distressed while they work through the painful memories of their lives and this may affect their behaviour.

Although distressing, it is far better that the child or young person has the opportunity to express their feelings with support around them. In the long run they should have a better sense of their life, family history and identity.