

Fostering

# Social Visits and Overnight Stays

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.

# Social Visits and Overnight Stays

## Relevant Legislation and Guidance

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

[STANDARD 9 - Promoting and supporting contact](#)

[The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review](#)

## Relevant Chapters

Delegated Authority Procedure

Contact with Parents, Siblings and Others Procedure

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## 1. Introduction

The guiding principle is that looked after children should as far as possible be given the same permission to take part in normal and acceptable age appropriate activities, such as staying with friends, as would reasonably be granted by parents of their peers. Judgment should depend on the assessed risks to and needs of the child. See also Delegated Authority Procedure.

When the child's placement is made, information regarding existing relationships with relatives and friends and the approach to the child continuing to have social visits to and with them, as well as visits involving friends and family of the foster carers and new friends who the child meets when in the foster placement, should be obtained from the child's social worker. The child's parents' views on such contact should also be obtained.

Arrangements for such contact (including overnight stays) should be set out in the Placement Plan and must be consistent with the child's Care Plan. This will include the parameters within which visits or stays away from the foster home may be agreed by the foster carer without prior consultation with the child's social worker.

## 2. Social Visits/Overnight Stays

The circumstances in which these situations may arise include the following:

- Sleepovers with friends;
- Invitations to go out for the day with a friend's family where the family are unlikely to be back until late;
- Invitations to join a friend's family who are going away for a weekend;
- The foster carer's own children going to a relative or friend for up to 4 days and the child wishing to go as well;
- A relative or friend of the foster family occasionally acting as baby-sitter where the usual arrangements have broken down or are not available;
- School or organised trips of up to 4 days away inside the UK.
- A child's authorised day visit with a friend or family being extended if the child cannot return due to bad weather or a car breaking down where there are no known restrictions to an overnight stay taking place.

It is important that, unless there is a specific reason why contacts or overnight stays should not take place (for example the child has harmed other children and they may still pose a risk) looked after children should be given the same permission to take part in normal and acceptable age appropriate activities, such as staying over with friends, as any child would.

Where there are exceptional reasons to require foster carers to seek the permission of the child's social worker, a manager or a parent, or place specific restrictions on permitting a child to stay overnight with friends, this should be because of reasons necessary to safeguard the child's welfare. If there is such a reason, the required arrangements should then be appropriately recorded including whether there is a need for Disclosure and Barring Service checks on the people involved in the contact, and these should be explained to the child. The child's social worker should review restrictions regularly to ensure they remain relevant.

Foster carers considering a request from a child to stay overnight with a friend should base their decision on the following factors:

- Are there any relevant restrictions in the child's Placement Plan?
- Are there any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour to preclude overnight stays?
- Are there any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed?
- Is the child staying with another child or children, rather than staying solely with an adult?
- The age and level of understanding of the child;

- What is the purpose and length of the overnight stay?
- Whose idea was the overnight stay?
- How well is the friend or family known to the child?

The arrangements for supervising or caring for the child must not compromise the safety of the child or of anyone else; and the following considerations should apply:

- Have the arrangements been confirmed with the parent of the friend or the adult who will have responsibility during the visit?
- What are the arrangements for the child returning to the home?
- Is there a contact number for the household in which the child will stay?
- Is the child aware of what to do if he or she wants to return to the home earlier than planned?
- Does the child have a contact number for the carers where they can be reached at any time?
- Does the child have access to a mobile phone?

In all cases, discussions should be held with the child, dependent on his or her age, as to what, if any, information should be shared with other adults to enable them to look after the child appropriately.

This might include:

- Any specific health care needs of the child;
- Any established routines for the child;
- Any behaviour management problems which, if the adult is unaware of, could lead to difficulties during the visit, for example the child may be over familiar with adults or over assertive with younger children.

Any decision to share information should be on a 'need to know' basis and recorded. If the child refuses to allow appropriate information to be shared, then he or she needs to be made aware that this could affect the decision to allow the child to stay away from home.

If satisfied that it is appropriate to allow the child's stay away, a decision to allow it to go ahead may be made. If not, it may not be allowed. The decision and the arrangements agreed should be recorded in full in the child's daily record.

Even if it has been agreed that the social worker does not have to be consulted in making these arrangements, s/he must still be informed and the social worker should inform the parents as appropriate.

Whenever the foster carers and/or the fostering agency's staff are concerned about a child's reaction to contact with relatives and friends, this will be communicated to the child's social worker, the discussion will be recorded and the need to review the arrangements will be considered.