

Fostering

Contact with Parents, Siblings and Others

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

Contact with Parents, Siblings and Others

Regulations and Standards

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Regulation 14 - Duty to promote contact

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

STANDARD 9 - Promoting and supporting contact

Scope of this Chapter

This chapter explains the arrangements that need to be in place in relation to the contact that children placed with agency foster carers have with parents, siblings and anyone with Parental Responsibility who is not a parent, siblings, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

Relevant Guidance

[The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review](#)

Relevant Chapters

Social Visits and Overnight Stays Procedure

Delegated Authority Procedure

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1. Contact with Parents and Siblings

For many children, relationships with family members, previous carers, friends and others are valued. Contact can be very important in helping children develop their sense of identity and understand their lives.

Wherever possible and appropriate, children should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their parents and siblings and anyone with Parental Responsibility who is not a parent, siblings, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

Such contacts should be consistent with the Child's Care Plan; which, itself, must take account of any Child Protection Plan or Contact Order that may be in force.

Contact between children and parents or siblings and others may only be permitted if previously agreed by the child's social worker and set out in the child's Placement Plan.

It may be useful to encourage young people to share details of how they communicate with others (this may include mobile phones or other social networking sites and apps and consoles such as Xbox or Play Station) and an agreement reached between the young person, social worker and foster carer about how safely to do this.

Contact arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration at all times and each child's wishes and needs for contact should be individually considered and regularly assessed. The wishes and feelings of the child should be ascertained, wherever possible, using advocacy and communication services if necessary.

So far as it is reasonably practicable, the wishes and feelings of the parents and the child's carers must be ascertained before a decision about contact arrangements is made.

Both direct and indirect contact arrangements should always be clearly detailed setting out the purpose, how contact will take place, the venue (or type of meeting place), the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed. The use of mobile communication should also be considered.

Contact arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

1.1 Unsupervised Contact

Children may only have unsupervised contact with the agreement of the placing authority and where the arrangements for such contact are set out in the Placement Plan.

1.2 Supervised Contact

The decision about the need for supervised contact will be made by the placing authority as part of the assessment and planning process, the reasons should be clearly recorded and the arrangements set out in the child's Placement Plan, which will be regularly reviewed as a minimum at the Looked After Review.

The arrangements will include the details about the role of the supervisor, the extent of the supervision required (it may be sufficient to supervise from an adjacent room) and if the visit is confined to a certain identified area, for example a specified contact centre.

Those supervising such visits should familiarise themselves with the requirements as detailed in the Placement Plan, follow the requirements specified and fully record their observations as soon as possible after the contact visit takes place.

1.3 Foster Carers Visiting Family Homes

Foster carer(s) may visit children or supervise them in the family homes, they must consult their Supervising Social Worker beforehand - and a risk assessment should be completed. Advice should be provided to the foster carer on any risks and strategies they should adopt.

If foster carers are confronted with unacceptable behaviour during the visit, they should attempt to comply with the guidance provided by their Supervising Social Worker, but if they consider that they and/or the child are at significant risk, they should leave, preferably with the child, and contact the child's social worker and their Supervising Social Worker in the first instance.

1.4 Concerns During Contact

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

Should foster carers or other agency staff have any concerns during contact and consider that immediate action is required, they should take what reasonable steps they can to reduce or prevent any risk - wherever possible this action should be taken by a foster carer after first consulting their Supervising Social Worker or by other agency staff after consulting their line manager. In exceptional circumstances, they should notify the Police.

Emergency restrictions on contact can only be made by the agency to protect the child from significant risk and must be notified to the placing authority (child's social worker) within 24 hours.

1.5 Restrictions or Termination of Contact

As stated above, contact should always be agreed with the placing authority and no restrictions on contact should be made by the foster carers without the agreement of the child's social worker.

*The only exception to this is in an emergency situation where the foster carer or a member of staff within the agency reasonably believes that they need to safeguard or promote the welfare of the child; if foster carers takes any such action, they must notify their Supervising Social Worker and the child's social worker immediately afterwards or as soon as is reasonably practicable but within one working day.