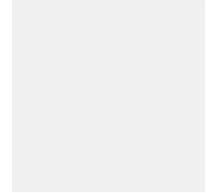


Bedroom Sharing Guidance



RELEVANT CHAPTER

This Chapter should be read in conjunction with **Bedroom Sharing Procedure**.

AMENDMENT

This chapter has been updated as a result of the Fostering Services Regulations and NMS, 2011.

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1. Introduction

Most of the children and young people who are Looked After by Walsall Social Care and Supported Housing live with foster carers.

As for any fostering service, Walsall's ability to place Looked After children within a family environment depends entirely upon the willingness of families and individuals in the community to share their homes and their lives with the children and young people whose parents are temporarily or permanently unable to care for them.

Although sharing their homes and lives with others of any age can bring foster carers joyous times and the feelings of personal satisfaction from helping others, it can also bring many misunderstandings, annoyances or serious conflicts. For many of our Looked After children their lives before being placed with foster carers have been traumatic and many children have experienced abuse. Many Looked After Children will be experiencing feelings of separation and loss. Certainly none of our looked after children will immediately understand or be able to respond to how their foster carer's home "works" for everyone who lives there.

For foster care to be successful for looked after children/young people and foster carers and their families, foster carers must provide a home environment that promotes the emotional well-being and physical safety of every person within the household.

Walsall's Bedroom Occupancy Policy has therefore been developed with the aims of providing a format for foster carers and involved social workers to use together to ensure that individual's differing needs and families diversity's are recognised and that every one within the foster caring household is protected and valued.

The policy complies with the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, Standard 10 Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child.

10.6) In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

And Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children:

4.1) Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation).

2. Recruitment of new Foster Carers

When recruiting prospective **short term break carers** for children with or without disabilities Walsall Family Placements will consider applications from people who do not have an unoccupied bedroom

fully available for fostering purposes so long as they can ensure that the bedroom will be available for the sole purpose of fostering for the duration of the proposed short term break periods. Naturally the views and consent of the bedroom's main user will need to be discussed by the applicants and by the assessing social worker. For the purpose of providing short term break placements bedroom shares with children already in the household will not be considered.

When recruiting prospective foster carers Walsall Family Placements will only consider applications from people wishing to provide **temporary placements** where there is at least one bedroom fully available for the purpose of fostering. Potential bedroom shares with children already within the household will not be considered (see **Section 10, Temporary Placements** and **Section 11, Short Term Breaks**).

When recruiting prospective foster carers who are wanting to offer **permanent placements** only bedroom shares between foster carer's child household members and permanently placed children will be discouraged. However, Family Placements will consider bedroom shares with the applicant's child household members subject to extensive exploration of the involved issues during the foster carer assessment and preparation process. The applicant's and the child whose bedroom it is proposed to share must be given opportunity to discuss their bedroom share proposals with approved foster carers and their children prior to approval. Family Placements recognises that all permanent placements are planned and that a detailed risk assessment can be undertaken prior to a placement match being agreed.

3. Fostering Household Safe Care Policy

Even before the very first looked after child comes to stay, every foster carer should have developed a general safe care policy for their home and family and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The policy should be written and drawn up in consultation with every member of the household. It should take into account the differing needs, views and lifestyles of every household member and consider the potential impacts of fostering on every one both inside and outside of the home. It is advisable that the policy be written only after reading Fostering Networks "Safe Caring" publication which the foster carer's assessing social worker or link worker will provide.

The safe care policy should include bedroom occupancy and usage. It should consider how household members view and use their bedrooms, how fostering might change how bedrooms are used and the things each person is able and willing to change and those they are not. Only after doing this important exercise will the household be able to identify how much space their home and family have for caring for other children or young people.

The policy should be discussed and agreed with the foster carer's assessing social worker or link worker and a copy be added to the foster carer's file held by the Family Placements Service.

When any Looked After child is coming to stay the foster caring household should review its safe care policy to include the known needs of the child who is coming to stay. Family Placements and Foster Carers will always need to take into account that especially for unplanned or emergency placements very often there is little reliable information regarding the child's care needs and work to maximise protection of the child and the household. The policy should then be reviewed again a few

weeks on when the foster carer and the looked after child have got to know one another better. Dependent upon the looked after child's level of understanding and emotional ability, they should be involved in reviewing the policy with the foster carer and be encouraged to contribute to it.

The policy should be agreed by the child's social worker and the foster carer's link worker.

The Household Safe Care Policy should be renewed at least once per year and every time there is a change in the household composition or in the needs of any household member, (e.g. significant changes in health or the amount of time household members spend in the home or if caring roles of household members change, new children being placed with the family etc.). Where there have been no changes necessitating a renewal of the household's safe caring policy, then the policy should be renewed at the time of the Foster Carer's Review. For newly approved foster carers the Foster Carer Review will be 6 months after approval and from then on and for all other carers at a frequency of not less than every twelve months.

4. Bedroom Sharing and Risk Assessment

Any bedroom share by children, related or none related, should only be agreed following a detailed assessment of the potential risks and benefits of the share.

When considering bedroom shares the fundamental questions that should be asked are: Why consider the bedroom share? What are the benefits and to whom? Do any risks outweigh the benefits? How realistically can any risks be minimised?

The assessment must include the needs of all of the children it is proposed could share. Equal emphasis should be given to foster carer's existing child household members as to the looked after child.

In undertaking the assessment where appropriate the children it is proposed could share a room should be consulted and their views or concerns taken into account. The foster carer, link worker (or their team manager) and the child's social worker must be consulted.

Where other involved social care or health professionals have relevant information their views on the proposed share should be sought and taken into account.

The assessment should detail any strategies proposed to minimise risks and indicate the carer's views on their abilities to implement the strategies effectively.

The Family Placement Referral comprises the Risk Assessment. The Family Placement Referral should be used when any bedroom share is proposed in any placement circumstances, e.g. move to permanent placement from temporary, respite placements, etc. The Risk Assessment component of the referral should be completed in detail and should cover potential risks to/from all household members. A copy of the referral should be given to the carer if the bedroom share is agreed.

Having regard to the assessment the Family Placement Team Manager will make the decision on whether the bedroom share should or should not be agreed.

5. Foster Carer's Child Household Members Including Permanent Foster Placements

Ideally child household members, including children permanently placed, should not be asked to share their bedroom with other children or young people. Generally, bedroom shares between child household members and looked after children will be discouraged by the Family Placement Services.

When considering the management of bedroom shares often the only consideration is of the need to ensure that all children are protected from abuse by other children. Whilst this must be a central consideration, it is not the only issue to consider.

Children who foster are an important part of the fostering family and the significant roles they play in the fostering task are often not fully acknowledged. When they share their family and home with other children, they also take on the needs and life experiences of the other children.

Whilst fostering can help children develop better understanding of themselves and others it will only do so if they feel listened to, supported and not less valued than the looked after children with whom they share their homes.

The research "How do "children who foster" perceive fostering?" undertaken by Wendy Spears and Melanie Cross and published by CoramBAAF, Quarterly Journal volume 27 in 2003, provides very useful information that foster carers and fostering services should take into account. Amongst the many issues and dilemmas children who participated identified, the importance of having your own space to retreat to and of being able to ignore and walk away from arguments were clearly emphasised. Overall the research highlighted the sense of responsibility children who foster develop in relation to the looked after children and the fostering task. Many of the children talked of the need for having opportunity to not to have to think you have to consider other children all of the time and of being able sometimes and somewhere to put themselves first. For many children, in a busy home and with the structure of school, this place can only be their bedroom.

For children placed permanently with foster carers being required to share their bedroom with others can convey the message that they do not truly belong and are not as important as other household members.

However, Walsall Family Placements also recognise that some children and young people enjoy and benefit from sharing their bedrooms with others and would not prescribe a lifestyle choice for a young person where no significant risk to them or others is existent.

Therefore, for **planned placements only** bedroom shares between a foster carer's child household members, including permanent placements, will be considered only following a detailed risk assessment. The child/young person whose bedroom it is proposed to share must be consulted about the proposed share by the family's link worker from Family Placements. The bedroom share arrangement should be regularly monitored and at the end of each placement the child's/young person's views on continuing to offer the bedroom share should be sought directly from them.

6. Children who Abuse Other Children

Every child has a right to be protected from abuse and harm. This includes protection from emotional, physical, sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, intimidation, coercion and exploitation. This includes abuse and harm from other children or young people. Foster carers and Family Placements have a duty and responsibility to ensure that all avoidable risks of abuse or harm are removed or minimised.

Where a child or young person is known to have abused or harmed another child, young person or adult they should not be considered to bedroom share with another child or young person.

Where the risk assessment indicates that the child's or young person's behavioural presentations are likely to be harmful to others they should not share a bedroom with other children. This can include children whose harmful behaviour is not directed to another person and confined to themselves, but which can be harmful for other children witnessing the behaviours, e.g. children who self-harm, children who masturbate excessively.

It is important to remember that it is not necessarily the case that a child who has experienced a particular form of abuse will go on to repeat this abuse. This will depend on many complex and variable factors.

A child or young person who does abuse others needs to be given the opportunity to learn how to manage the abusive behaviour and to satisfy the need that drives the abusive action in other ways.

Every foster caring household should work on the basis that very often we do not know all that the child has experienced in their lives and that where bedroom shares are to be considered they should only be so when detailed, substantive information about the children to share is available.

7. Foster Carer's Bedroom Sharing With Looked After Children

Family Placements recognise that on occasion the care needs of Looked After babies can be better met by the baby sleeping in a cot in the foster carer's room.

Some babies who have additional health care needs, or who have sensory impairments or who are severely traumatised will often require very high levels of physical contact and constant monitoring.

Only babies aged between 00 and 18 months at the time of placement should be accommodated in a cot in the carer's bedroom. By a maximum of 24 months the baby should be being transferred to their own bedroom. By this age children are more able to identify what is happening around them. The carer's ability to ensure that their own privacy is maintained becomes increasingly difficult. Children of this age need to be learning that they are and can be safe without their main carer being within their immediate sight or hearing. They need to be learning that they can be safe within themselves and their main carer giver will come back and will respond if they need them.

If it is known that a baby's placement duration is likely to be for approximately 12 months, Family Placements will not place a baby older than 6 months with a foster carer who is only able to provide a cot in the carer's own bedroom.

8. Bedroom Shares by Children of Different Genders

In determining whether it is appropriate for children of different genders to share a bedroom not just the age of the children, but the children's developmental stage and life experiences need to be taken into account.

Girls and boys should not share bedrooms with one another beyond the oldest child being 5 years of age. At this stage children, whilst always aware of gender difference, are more likely to begin to experiment with what the difference means to them and other people. They often start to become shy and to feel less comfortable with others seeing their bodies and or knowing about their bodily functions and to feel acute embarrassment if they think they have done something that others will find not OK or funny.

However, many looked after children will have also experienced abuse. Some children may have been sexually abused themselves or have been exposed to adult sexual behaviours. Some children may have been the victim or witness of repeated acts of violence. This can mean that they sometimes re-enact or mimic behaviours they have been exposed to that can be harmful to the emotional and behavioural development of the other child sharing the bedroom.

For any room share a risk assessment must be completed. If the assessment indicates that risks which can not be minimised for a share between a male child and female child both below the age 5 years is existent then the room share should not be agreed.

For children placed with family and friends foster carers, where the male and female children aged 5 years or above who are sharing a bedroom have an existent, significant relationship, Foster Panel can exercise some discretion in relation to agreeing the room share. However, agreement is subject to the outcome of the detailed risk assessment and needs to incorporate an action plan to cater for each child's developing needs.

9. Bedroom Space

In considering bedroom shares the space available in the room needs to be given very careful consideration.

Whilst Family placement have not set specific amounts of space required per child the immediate and predicted usage of the bedroom by the children to share needs to be taken into account.

Each child needs to have their own bed. Each child needs space to store clothes and personal possessions. There needs to be space for children to store toys or items connected with hobbies or interests. Each child needs to have wall space to be able to display pictures of importance to them. Each child needs to be able to store securely items they regard as valuable.

Children should have space for quiet, reflective time within the bedroom.

Each child needs space to be able to do home work and to store school books and work safely. If this is not in their bedroom another space in the home should be identified and respected by all household members as a place to study.

10. Temporary Placements

For unplanned/emergency Temporary placements undertaking bedroom share risk assessments at the time of placement is only rarely reliable. Very often little information is known or available about the child.

Very often the child to be placed is in crisis or is traumatised. The child themselves has no emotional space to be able to take on the needs of others. They are unlikely to have had any opportunity to be prepared for being looked after.

For these reasons bedroom shares with either other looked after children or foster carer's household members children with children placed in an unplanned or emergency situation will not be considered.

Where siblings are to be placed together in an unplanned or emergency situation bedroom shares with one another will be considered subject to the outcomes of the child/ren's case holder and their line managers initial risk assessment. The child/ren's case holder must share their Single Assessment of any potential risks as a result of the proposed bedroom share with the Family Placement Service before the placement can be agreed to proceed.

Within six weeks of placement the Placement Referral form including the detailed risk assessment of the bedroom sharing arrangement will be completed. Foster Carers, where appropriate the involved children and the child's social worker will be consulted. The foster carers will be given a copy of the placement referral.

Where risks are identified, strategies to minimise the risks will need to be developed by the foster carers and involved social workers and implemented by the foster carers and their household members immediately. Where a risk it is not possible to realistically minimise is identified then a strategy or planning meeting will be convened immediately to make a decision on whether the placement is to be ended or whether it is possible to provide additional supports that will assist the continuation of the placement.

Bedroom shares for planned Temporary Placements will be considered following a detailed risk assessment being completed.

11. Short Term Break Placements

All short term break arrangements are planned.

Children and young people utilising this service often require high levels of help with their physical or personal care needs, some require invasive care or treatment whilst being looked after. It is vital that their needs for privacy, their abilities to maintain their dignity and their opportunities to maximise or develop their independence are respected.

Bedroom shares during short term breaks will therefore only be considered in exceptional circumstances and where a detailed risk assessment has been completed and the child and the child's parent or guardian have been consulted and given consent to the arrangements.

12. Permanent Placements

As for foster carer's child household members, looked after children placed permanently should not be asked to bedroom share with other children other than their siblings, and any sharing arrangement should be subject to risk assessment and regular monitoring. Generally, bedroom sharing between permanently placed children and those children placed temporarily will be discouraged by Family Placement Services.

Children placed permanently need opportunity to develop a sense of belonging in and ownership of their home and family.

Very often the very fact of being placed with a view to remaining permanently will bring new and threatening issues for them. They are having to now incorporate new, intimate relationships into their world and existing family relationships. Their view of themselves and others and the strategies they developed to survive their circumstances will all be being challenged. This can lead to previous difficult to manage behaviour re-emerging or new challenging behaviours being displayed. Children who have previously not felt safe enough to be vulnerable to others can often begin to release and need to work through previous trauma. All of these issues will impact on the child's ability to share a bedroom.

Therefore, **for planned placements only, (including planned respites)** bedroom shares between children placed permanently will be considered only following a detailed risk assessment. The child/young person whose bedroom it is proposed to share must be consulted about the proposed share by the family's link worker from Family Placements. The bedroom share arrangement should be regularly monitored and at the end of each placement the child's/young person's views on continuing to offer the bedroom share should be sought directly from them.

13. Family and Friend Placements

Many, but not all, Family and Friend Foster Carers are providing children and young people with a permanent home. Most placements with Family and Friend Foster Carers are planned. In ensuring the safety and protection of all children and young people within the household the bedroom sharing policy is to be applied equally to all foster caring households.

The only exception to this is where children are placed as an Emergency with Connected Persons Carers under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. It is not uncommon for bedroom sharing arrangements in such circumstances to have to be made.

For such placements, the placing social worker will have completed a single assessment, including a rudimentary risk assessment of the proposed sleeping arrangements (WSS645 part 1) - see **Placements with Connected Persons Procedure** for more information.

However, the nature of the placement will mean that a detailed risk assessment of the bedroom sharing arrangement will not have been completed. Very often neither the foster carer nor the placing social worker have complete information regarding the child's needs and are not in a

position to be able to accurately determine the implications of the bedroom share beyond the placement date.

Within six weeks of placement the placement referral form including the detailed risk assessment of any bedroom sharing arrangement will be completed to contribute to the foster carer assessment. Foster Carers, where appropriate the involved children and the child's social worker will be consulted. The foster carers will be given a copy of the placement referral.

Where risks are identified, strategies to minimise the risks will need to be developed by the foster carers and involved social workers and implemented by the foster carers and their household members immediately. Where a risk it is not possible to realistically minimise is identified then a strategy or planning meeting will be convened immediately to make a decision on whether the placement is to be ended or whether it is possible to provide additional supports that will assist the continuation of the placement. Where not prejudicial to the risk factors to be considered at the strategy meeting, the foster carers should attend.

It is important to remember that whilst priority must always be given to supporting a child to remain with family and friend foster carers, especially where there are already existing significant relationships, that the placement will only be safe and successful for everyone if avoidable risk is minimised. A child's safety can not be compromised and the already difficult foster caring task will be made much harder for the carer to manage where substantial risks are not addressed.

14. Fostering fee and Assessed Capacity

Foster carers who are on the Household Scheme receive a fee for the number of placements they are approved to be able to care for at any one time; for their placement capacity. This will sometimes include the capacity for them to take children who can bedroom share.

In situations where foster carers are asked to take a placement of a child or young person where because of the child's needs a bedroom share is not possible, then the carer continues to be paid at their approved capacity number and not the actual number of children in placement. For example, if the foster carer is approved for three placements but can only take two because a bedroom share for the children in placement is not possible then the carer will continue to receive a fee for three placements.

Carers on the former fee per bed scheme continue to receive a fee for each child or young person in placement.

Fostering allowances are the maintenance allowance for the child and are only paid for each child in placement.