

Guidance for Decision Making and Continuing to Support Foster Carers who are Placed 'On Hold'

This chapter was introduced into the Manual in October 2011.

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1. Foster Carers who Request to go 'On Hold'

Foster carers may decide for themselves that they would like a period of time when they do not foster any children and request to go 'on hold'. This may be as a result of a family illness, bereavement or to give the family time to take stock of personal circumstances. There may also be a range of other more practical reasons why foster carers wish to go 'on hold'.

Before agreeing to place a foster carer 'on hold' the following should be considered.

- a. What are the reasons for the request?;
- b. How long is the foster carer requesting to go 'on hold' for? Foster carers should not normally be 'on hold' for longer than 12 months;
- c. What are the agreed continuing arrangements for support and supervision? At a minimum there should be a support telephone contact every 3 months;
- d. Will the foster carer continue to attend training?

A brief report outlining the above should be presented to the relevant team manager for comment and approval. This should be agreed and signed by the foster carers and placed on their fostering file.

If it is felt that the period of time being requested is unreasonable, i.e. over 12 months, the supervising social worker and/or team manager should have a discussion with the foster carers about other alternatives, i.e. resignation or re-approval in a different category.

Where a family has been 'on hold' for longer than 6 months and/or there is a significant change to the family circumstances a foster carer review should be completed and presented to the Fostering Panel before they are deemed available for placement.

The Group Manager, Family Placement Service should be informed of any delay/postponement in a foster carer review being presented to Fostering Panel due to a foster carer being 'on hold'.

Issues to be considered in relation to foster carers returning after being 'on hold'

When a foster carer returns to fostering after a period of being 'on hold,' the supervising social worker should ensure that a discussion is held to include the following issues.

- Are any particular support services required?;
- Is increased visiting frequency and/or supervision required for the first 12 months?;
- Are the foster carers aware of any new procedures or processes that have been introduced while they have been away?;
- What skill level are they returning on? If the foster carer cannot demonstrate the appropriate skill level then consideration may need to be given, in discussion with the foster carer, of returning to fostering on a lower skill level;
- Are there any outstanding training needs?;
- On returning to fostering, the foster carers' details and any conditions to their return should be updated on Mosaic as appropriate.

2. Placing Foster Carers 'On Hold' initiated by the Fostering Service

There may be many reasons why the fostering service might consider placing a foster carer 'on hold'. It would usually relate to a significant change in the circumstances to the fostering household or following a significant event such as a complaint or allegation.

Before deciding to place a foster carer 'on hold' the following should be considered:

- What are the reasons?;
- Have they been discussed with the foster carer?;
- Should the foster carer be restricted from taking all placements? Or are there matching implications that would make it possible for the foster carer to be considered for some children for much shorter periods, or younger/older children only for a time limited period?;
- What are the implications for the department with regard to health and safety issues? Should a risk assessment be undertaken before making any further placements if there are concerns about the person's physical or emotional health?;
- Is medical information and guidance required from family GP or medical advisor?

If a foster carer is put 'on hold' following an allegation that is being investigated under the child protection procedures then clear guidance must be given to foster carers, and members of their household, about ongoing contact with **Looked After** Children who have previously left the placement or whose placements have ended as a result of the current enquiries.

Each situation may need to be considered case-by-case. But the needs of any child to be placed, and the prevention of disruption to any placement, should be of paramount importance.

Any decision to place a foster carer 'on hold' should be fully discussed beforehand with the Group Manager Family Placement Service and recorded on an MDR. The decisions for placing a foster carer 'on hold' should be put in writing to them with additional information about who they can make representation to if they do not agree with the decision (i.e. Group Manager Family Placement Service).

The letter informing the foster carers that they are being placed 'on hold' should also include:

- The circumstances leading to the decision being made;
- What outcome is to be achieved before a foster carer can resume fostering;
- What arrangements are to be put in place for continued supervision and support; and
- Information regarding the Fostering Network Mediation and Advice Worker.

The ongoing payment of the household fee will fall within the **Payment for Skills and the Skills Level Criteria Procedure**.

Any subsequent decision about resignation or de-registration should follow the normal departmental policies and procedures and do not fall within these guidelines.

When making a decision to agree to a foster carer returning to the fostering task all the issues as outlined in **Issues to be considered in relation to foster carers returning after being 'on hold'** above (and any others specific to this individual case) should be considered. The decision agreeing the return to fostering, along with any conditions, should be agreed by the Group Manager, Family Placement Service recorded on an MDR. The carers will be informed in writing by the supervising social worker of the decision, reasons and any conditions attached.