**Health and Safety Policy for Foster Carers**

**Introduction**

Approved foster homes need to be safe for children and young people to live in. It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure, as far as possible, that the foster home fulfils safety standards and meets the requirements of National Minimum Standards.

The following guidance is provided to highlight some common areas of concern regarding household health and safety and to assist foster carers in providing an appropriate safe environment for fostered children and young people.

**Policy**

The National Minimum Standard 10 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 require fostering services to provide foster homes for children that are warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of hygiene.

It is recognised that children placed in foster care may be more at risk of accidents within the home and outdoor spaces as they will be joining a new and possibly unfamiliar household, may have particular needs that make them more vulnerable to accidents and that these will require an appropriate level of supervision at all times.

While accidents can happen risks should be minimised and a Health and Safety Checklist completed for all prospective and approved foster carers and reviewed at least annually, viewing all indoor and outdoor spaces of the home. If a carer moves home or completes significant renovation, the health and safety checklist will need to be reviewed.

The Health and Safety Checklist should take into account the carers type and level of approval highlighting the needs of children within that age group. Particular attention should be taken of the individual needs of children being placed/within placement i.e. disability or developmental delay, and any immediate hazards removed before the placement of a child.

**General safety**

* A fostered child should never share the foster carers bed or that of any other household member.
* Babies can share the foster carers bedroom while in a cot, but must then be moved into their own bedroom at age 2.
* It may be suitable for siblings to share a bedroom although their individual needs should be taken into account. Siblings of a different gender should not share a bedroom over the age of 10.
* If bedroom sharing is to be considered outside of this, a risk assessment should be completed with the child’s SW to determine the appropriateness.
* Every fostering household should have a basic first aid box, which should be maintained.
* Babies and toddlers require a high level of supervision inside and outside of the home.
* Babies should never be left alone in the bath, even if secured in a bath seat or bath.
* Children under 5 years old will not be placed with carers who smoke; it is also not advised that older children with asthma are placed with smokers.
* High factor sun cream should be applied when required. Waterproof lotion should be used if swimming. Exposure during 11am- 3pm should be avoided.
* Hot water from the tap should be monitored to ensure it does not cause accidental scalding. Temperature should be set no higher than 43 degrees centigrade.
* Kettle wires should not hang down over the counter.
* Care should be taken when placing down hot drinks, care should be taken with table cloths which can be pulled when containing hot drinks.

**Electrical safety**

* Sockets should be securely fixed to the wall, no scorch marks or bare wires showing
* No ordinary sockets should be in bathrooms
* Plugs should be securely fitted to all items with no cracks. Cables should be securely fixed to the cable grip. All pins should be securely fitted and straight. Any damaged plug should be replaced.
* Sockets are not to be overloaded. 2 or 3 way socket adaptors are not to be used as it is easy to overload. Use one plug board per socket only.
* Electrical switches should be securely fixed to the wall. Any cracked or scorched switches should be replaced, Bathroom should only contain pull cord switches.
* Electrical meter cupboards should be locked to ensure they are not accessible by younger children.
* Electrical appliances should be in a good state of repair, with no exposed wires or obvious signs of damage i.e. overheating.
* Portable appliance should be located in safe places, never to be used in bathrooms and should be in a position which does not create a trip hazard.
* RCD (residual current device) should be used with outdoor appliances; appliances such as lawn mowers or heaters should be unplugged when not in use.
* Plug socket covers should no longer be used. Children must be supervised and warned to keep away from plug socket outlets until they are capable of understanding the risks and are able to use them safely.

**Slips trip and falls**

* Stair gates should be utilised for children under 5 years and should be fitted in a way to prevent them having access to the stairs. They may also be required for older children dependant on their needs. (Stair gates can also be utilised to prevent access to other hazardous areas).
* Any equipment from which a child can fall should have appropriate working restraints i.e. high chairs, buggies.
* Wires and cables should not run across the floor where they may cause a trip or fall.
* All windows that can be accessed by children must have restraints to prevent the children opening, falling or climbing out. Window lock should be kept securely at hand to adults in the case of an emergency
* Bunk beds should not be used at all for children under 6 years old; even if children sleep on the bottom they may be tempted to climb onto the top bunk. If there are bunks present in other rooms in the home, supervision is essential to prevent younger children from falling or becoming trapped.
* Any bunk beds must meet the following dimensions: Gaps in the base or sleeping surface must not be more than 75mm (about 3 ins). All other gaps in the structure must not be less than 60mm and not more than 75mm. Where there is an opening in the side of the upper bunk to allow access, this gap must be at least 300mm (almost 12 ins). <http://www.thehealthandsafetyconsultancy.co.uk/guides/bunkbeds.asp>
* Any balconies should have walls or railings that cannot be climbed by children.
* Any railings or bars inside or outside of the home should have a maximum width of 100mm to prevent choking.
* Floor covering should be in good condition and securely fitted; frayed carpet presenting a trip hazard should be replaced or repaired.
* Rugs should be secured if they are used on highly polished floors or floors that can become slippery.
* All stairs should have a handrail securely fitted.

**Choking hazards**

* Pillows should not be used for babies under 1.
* Sheets and lightweight blankets should be used for babies under 1 as opposed to duvets.
* Bumpers should never be used.
* Ensure that lopped cords are tied or secured out of the reach of children.
* Rotary driers should not be accessible by children.
* Any cords or lines should be positioned at a height when children could fall and it becomes a choking hazard
* Always hold a babies bottle and the baby while feeding.
* Always keep small items such as toys, coins, buttons and batteries out of the reach of babies and young children (as well as being a choking hazard batteries can cause severe internal burns if swallowed).
* When babies move to solids, food should be cut up into small pieces (a baby can choke on something as small as a grape, these should be cut lengthways).
* Do not give young children hard food such as hard boiled sweets
* An adult should supervise children when eating and they should be encouraged to sit and eat as running while eating could cause choking.
* Toys designed for older children should be out of reach of babies and toddler as they could have small parts.
* Chest freezers should be kept locked.
* Cot sides, bed sides, railing and banisters should have a maximum opening of 100mm to prevent choking.

**Drowning/suffocation**

* Children can drown in less than 3cm of water. They should be under constant supervision when in or near any water.
* Never leave young children or babies in the bath unsupervised, even for a moment, even if secured is a bath seat
* Never leave uncovered bowls or buckets of water around the home
* Paddling pools should be emptied and stored away when not in use
* Garden ponds should be filled in while children are small or securely fenced off. Take special care when visiting other people’s gardens.
* Plastic bag can cause suffocation and should not be left in the reach of young children, particularly under 5.

**Glass safety**

* All lower level glass that a child could fall or run into should be safety glass or fitted with safety film. This extends to glass outside the property.
* When buying furniture which incorporates glass, look for approval to BS EN 12521:2009 and BS 14749-2005, BS EN 14072:2003, BS EN 12150-1:2000 and BS EN 12600-2002
* Buy a greenhouse or cold frame with special safety glazing features or isolate with fencing.
* Large, low level fish tanks present a risk and should not be accessible to a child.
* Ornaments and glass items should be kept out of the reach of children.
* Drinking glasses should not given to children under 5.
* Always clear up broken glass quickly and dispose of it safely

**Safe storage**

* All medication should be kept locked away out of the reach of children; they could be mistaken for sweets or older children could experiment.
* Flammable materials should not be stored in the home. Any spare gas cylinders should be stored outdoors.
* All chemicals or cleaning products should be stored in their original containers and stored away out of the reach of children. Older children may have access as they become independent but should still be stored away safely from younger children.
* Knives and scissor should be stored out of the reach of younger children and ideally locked away. Children should be supervised using scissors and children under the age of 7 only use play scissors.
* Cigarettes, lighters, matches and alcohol should be kept out of the reach of children. Alcohol should be stored in a locked cupboard. E-cigarettes and refills should also be kept out of reach; risk of poisoning.
* Shampoos, cosmetics and razors should be out of the reach of young children who may mistake items for drinks or attempt to imitate shaving. Items should also be locked out of reach if caring for children where there is a risk of self-harm.
* Any hazardous or dangerous items should be kept locked away, for example garages or garden sheds containing hazardous items should not be freely accessible to children.

**Food hygiene**

* Food preparation area should be kept clean and tidy to prevent risk of food poisoning.
* Dish drying clothes should be washed regularly.
* The fridge should be kept between 0C – 5C (32F – 41F).
* Separate chopping boards/ areas should be used for raw and cooked food to avoid contamination. Storage areas for food should be kept clean.
* Food to be consumed within the use by date.
* Separate utensils should be used for pet food. Pets should not lick food from plates or utensils used by household members.

**Fire / fumes**

* Install a smoke alarm on each floor of your home. Test alarms on a weekly basis.
* Ensure that all members of the household know how to dial 999 and how to escape in the event of a fire.
* Exit routes should always be kept clear of prams, toys and other obstacles.
* When exit doors are locked (e.g. at night), keys must be easily accessible.
* Ensure that everybody knows what to do if trapped by a fire: go into a room, shut the door, put a blanket at the bottom of the door and call for help through the window.
* Some very small house fires can be tackled with a damp tea towel. (A damp tea towel has been shown to be more effective than a fire blanket as it can smother the fire more effectively).
* RoSPA does not recommend the use of domestic fire extinguishers because they can be difficult to use in a panic situation and not all extinguishers are suitable for all types of fires.
* Children should not sleep in a loft or attic space.
* Fire guards are required when caring for children under 5. They should cover all of the fire and be securely fitted.
* Firearms, guns, ammunition, air riffles or crossbows should not be accessible to children within the foster home. It is unusual for them to be present, however if so there should be a licence and the item locked away.
* Care should be taken when cooking. Pan handles should be turned away and not over a heat source to prevent small children reaching and grabbing. Cookers should be secure to ensure items cannot fall off.
* Furniture such as sofas and armchairs should be fire retardant. Some older items, pre 1988 may not be filled with fire retardant material and should be replaced.
* Matches and lighters must be kept out of the reach of children.
* Candles and burners should be used when children are not around (i.e. in the evening and in a place safe for the open fire). Burning candles should not be left unattended and should be extinguished.
* Check that all Halloween and fancy dress costumes you buy carry a CE mark on the label
* As with all clothing, Halloween and fancy dress outfits should always be kept away from fire, lit candles and all other naked flames

**Outdoor / garden**

* Ponds, pools, hot tubs or open water should be securely covered or fenced off.
* Children should be supervised at all times around open water.
* Paddling pools or water buckets should be emptied immediately after use.
* Children should be supervised when accessing sandpits. Sandpits should be covered over when not in use to prevent animal waste and also avoid suffocation if child not supervised. Essential information for under 5 year olds.
* Power tools and gardening tolls should be securely stored out of the reach of children.
* Handrails should be fitted where there are open outdoor steps. Young children should hold an adults hand.
* Gardens should be secure. Gates leading to roads should have a lock or be barred by a devise out of the child’s reach. Fencing should have a gap no larger than 100mm to prevent suffocation.
* There should be no poisonous plants in carers gardens. See <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/02/uk-poisonous-plants/>
* Outdoor play equipment such as swings and slides should be secure to the ground and placed on soft surfaces such as grass or bark, not on concrete areas. Trampoline should have a safety net.
* Animal waste should be cleaned up immediately.
* Vehicles and machinery should be kept locked.
* Sheds and garages are to be kept locked.
* Barbeques should not be left unattended.

**Household hygiene**

* Rubbish should be disposed of timely to prevent the spread of bacteria or vermin.
* The home should be kept hygienically clean to prevent the build-up of bacteria, particularly in the kitchen and bathrooms. Action should be taken to address any damp within the home.
* Bedding should be changed and kept free from damp.

**Vehicle safety and travel**

* All drivers transporting children must have a full UK driving licence.
* All vehicles must have a valid MOT, required on any vehicle over 3 years old. Certificate should be presented to supervising social worker.
* Third party insurance is the minimum insurance legally required to ensure a child is covered for any accident against them, although carers are encouraged to gain fully comprehensive insurance to cover all eventualities. All foster carers must contact their insurance provider to ensure they are covered to transport children in their care.
* Child locks should be used in vehicles.
* Vehicles should be kept locked at all times and keys should be out of the reach of children.
* Children should always wear their seatbelt. It is legally the drivers responsibility to ensure children under 14 are restrained correctly in the vehicle.
* Children should travel in a car seat suitable to their age. The law requires that all children travelling in the front or rear seat of any car, van or goods vehicle must use the correct [child car seat](https://www.childcarseats.org.uk/types-of-seat/) until they are either 135 cm in height or 12 years old (which ever they reach first). After this they must use an adult seat belt. <https://www.childcarseats.org.uk/the-law/>
* Drivers should take regular breaks during long journeys and not drive tired or under the influence of alcohol.
* Carers should notify the supervising social worker of any health conditions affecting driving.

**Pet safety**

* Pit bull terriers and Japanese Tosa are on the dangerous dog list so should not be in the foster home. See the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.
* The RSPCA have identified Alsatians, Dobermans and Rottweilers as dogs with aggressive temperaments so it is advised they are not in the foster home.
* It is expected that general care of pets is maintained, for example six monthly worming of domestic pets is required.
* If a child is placed with known allergies, specific advice should be gained from medics in respect of measures to be taken to minimise impact.
* Pets are not to sleep in children’s beds. Keep pets out of children’s bedrooms where possible.
* Pets should not lick plates or other utensils used by household members.
* Cat litters should be emptied on a regular basis.
* Dogs should be toilet trained.
* An annual pet assessment must be completed by the supervising social worker. More than three dogs is classed as a pack and the specialist dog assessor should complete such assessments annually as directed by the supervising social worker.
* Any exotic pets should be cared for as advised. See <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/other>
* Young children under 5 should not handle or touch amphibians, reptiles or their environment due to the risk of Salmonella and other infection.

**Specific activities / leisure pursuits (horse riding, abseiling, water sports, rock climbing canoeing)**

* Carers must ensure that facilitators have the correct qualifications and that organisation possess the licence required by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority.
* Carers must have delegated authority to consent to such activities, if not this should be discussed with the child’s social worker.
* If a child has a specific need where it is determined a further risk assessment may be required, this also needs to be discussed with the child’s social worker.