**Introduction to Safer Caring**

Working out a [safer](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/-/media/norfolk/downloads/children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/general-documents/nfs-safe-care-policy-procedure.docx) care policy for your family, including your foster child, is not about changing everything that you do. It's about thinking about what parts of the family’s behaviour involve risk and working out what you can all do so that safe care becomes part of everyday life. This will have already been covered on the Skills to Foster course/preparation training.

It will also help you to know how to deal with situations that might seem OK in your own family but are not safe in a foster family. Everybody in the home should be aware of the policy and signed up to it. Regular visitors to the home also need to know about the policy and you'll need to think about it too when you go on holiday.

The aim is for all those involved to understand what might happen and to avoid the child feeling worried or anxious. The objectives of safer caring practices are:

* To keep the foster child safe from abuse by adults
* To keep children in the foster home safe from abuse by other children in the household
* To keep members of the foster family safe from false allegations of abuse

The whole family should be involved in agreeing your policy and in reviewing it each year (or when circumstances change). Your supervising social worker can support you with this.

When you have completed your Safe Care Family policy, you should discuss it with the child’s social worker and give a copy to Dudley Fostering Service. Sometimes you may need to review your Safe Care Family policy because something new happens like a new placement.

All those involved in foster care need to acknowledge that, although small in number, children in foster care can and have been abused by adults entrusted to care for them, or birth children of foster carers or visitors to their home. Foster children and young people may abuse their siblings or other children; or may make false allegations against you or other members of your household.

Allegations are an occupational hazard of fostering and by trying to avoid them we might become organised by and act in fear, which will not enhance the desired physical and emotional responses we need when caring for children. What is needed is that foster carers and people working with children always try to act with integrity and can speak about our thinking behind our actions, so we are then in a position to manage allegations without adopting a defensive stance.

An important starting point when considering safe care is for you to understand your values, and how you operate as a family or household.

Information should be sought from the child’s social worker at the time of placement about any specific needs or issues relating to the child, which will need to be taken into account. This should include any care needs relating to the health or any disabilities a child may have.

When caring for a child with a disability, extra consideration needs to be given to any specific needs and personal care that will need to put in place that may differ from the norms of the family and a record of the reasoning behind these changes.

You will also require adequate resources, training, and support. We are committed to working closely with you in developing and maintaining safer practices. There is core and specialist training workshops for you to attend, with regular supervision given to all Dudley Fostering Service Foster Carers, as well as more specialist support provided, when required.

You are encouraged to get into the routine of seeking help and support from your supervising social worker, the child’s social worker and other foster carers. Practical help in the home and regular time off can leave you with more energy for the time you spend with the child and your own family. It's important to develop a range of support systems inside and outside the foster home.

In addition to this policy, further information pertinent to Safer Caring can be accessed at: [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

**Working out your Safe Caring Family Policy**

Safer Caring will form part of the core subjects for approved foster carers training. You're expected to attend safeguarding training every three years from your approval.

You should be clear and direct in telling children about their rights to personal space, boundaries, and limits, and in teaching them how to go about claiming those rights for themselves. Children learn through experience and part of their learning comes from their role models.

**Showing affection**

People have different ways of showing affection. You need to be careful not to impose your ways on others. In addition, if touch has meant something other than affection to a child in the past, they might not understand that when you try to show them physical affection this is not intended as a prelude to sexual activity.

A safe rule to follow is that no-one touches another person’s body without that person’s permission. Children should always be asked if they would like a kiss or a hug or a cuddle. They need to be taught by a caring adult to say ‘no’ if they don’t want to be touched. You might need to help the foster child work out how to seek comfort from an adult in appropriate ways.

Showing affection and warmth to a foster child or young person is an essential part of your role. It can be expressed verbally even if physical demonstrations are not OK for the foster child.

**The names you use**

Children should call you by your first name. Discourage the child from calling you ‘mummy’ or ‘daddy’ because it causes confusion about their own family.

**The bathroom**

All children who are old enough and able to bath and wash themselves should have privacy in the bathroom. If a child needs adult help and supervision, please discuss this with the social workers. The door should be kept unlocked and slightly open (in line with your individualised safe care policy).

**How and where do you dress and undress in your family and what do you wear at home?**

Think about how people dress around the home. Don’t walk around in your underwear or nightwear. If you do, you could trigger something in a child’s memory and cause them to respond inappropriately. Their misinterpretations might leave family members feeling confused and uncomfortable and not knowing what to do about it.

Make sure that your family and children joining your household have a dressing gown and slippers as well as nightwear.

**Playing**

Try and keep all children within sight when they are playing, be vigilant. Dudley fostering service doesn’t encourage children playing together in bedrooms, this should take place under supervision and in communal areas.

Think about what you can do to make sure everyone is kept safe. You may decide that the child and others should play at your home. These decisions about safety and privacy are more difficult when they are about older children – discuss with your supervising social worker or the child’s social worker if you are not sure.

Tickling and playfighting is discouraged by Dudley MBC Fostering Service, carers should discuss with the Supervising Social Worker how best children in care can enjoy safe play which promotes their developmental and welfare needs.

**Your bedroom**

You may have allowed your own children into your bed in the mornings or to be comforted when they were not well. You need to be aware of the dangers of doing this when you are fostering a child. It will be safer to provide all children with a time of warmth and affection outside of your bedroom, so it's important you explain this to your own children, prior to foster children being placed. This should avoid friction or a dilemma for the family later.

**The child's bedroom**

Children need their privacy respected. They need their own space, so that they can learn that they have the right to be safe and private. For some children it is important that they have somewhere to keep their possessions safe.

Your family policy should be clear about bedroom rules; people must understand how threatening it can be for a child who has been abused to have their privacy invaded. As children grow older, they should be given increasing control over who goes into their room.

Anyone who needs to go into a child’s bedroom should ask permission first and should leave the door open. This applies to children as well as adults. Everyone should be aware and sensitive about what they do.

**Bedtimes**

Consideration needs to be given to age-appropriate bedtimes. Similar precautions should be given to bedtime routines as those given to bath times, and for the same reasons. All carers should leave the door open when putting children to bed. Everyone must think about doing things in a way that is safe for children subject to the child’s individual safe care plan.

**Travelling by car**

Be aware of the safety requirements, regarding travelling with children in the car. All children under the age of 12 years, or below a 135cm in height are required to use car seats and seat belts, appropriate to their age. Please see below guidance around the law for children travelling in vehicles:

<https://www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules/when-a-child-can-travel-without-a-car-seat>

<http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/the-law/>

According to the experience of the child, other safety issues may need to be considered regarding transporting children in vehicles, this should be discussed with the allocated supervising social worker and be informed by the individual safer care plan.

**Taking photos, videos, and the internet**

It should be clear in the Placement Plan who can sign to agree for the child’s photo or video footage being taken in settings such as school. If photos, videos, or the internet have been part of any abuse for the child or young person, you should check the best way forward with the child’s social worker.

It's always helpful when you take photos or videos to ask the child’s permission first, to make sure they get copies and ensure they know how the images will be used. Photos are an important record of a child’s past, so where appropriate, record information for them to take with them in their own photo album or life story book. Foster children’s photos cannot be published without our permission.

When the child uses the internet, take an interest in what they do and agree, when where and how they will use it. Look into some software that filters inappropriate material for children.

**Education about sex and sexuality**

Relationships and sex education are important for all of us as we grow up. This should also be age appropriate. Children need to be helped to think about what makes a good friend and what makes a bad friend. They need to learn how to avoid situations that might put them at risk of abuse and how to protect themselves and others. Children need to learn how to say ‘no’.

You need to know how to explain the difference between what is and is not acceptable behaviour and how to help children change behaviour that is not right for their age. You may need to say that you are talking to them about relationships and sex to help them deal with situations, feel safer and as part of growing up not to abuse them further.

Families will have different approaches to this subject and how children get information about relationships, sex and sexuality and what they are told. You will need to find out from the child’s social worker what the family’s approach was and the best way of dealing with this, particularly if the child or young person has a different cultural or religious background from your own. You may also want to check out with school what they are doing on the subject so you can be prepared.

Providing a safer environment means that other children in the foster home must understand that any sexual activity with a foster child is as unacceptable as with a biological brother or sister. The most important thing is that the child feels they can come and ask you questions and talk to you about the subject if they are not sure.

Foster carers should never share personal details about this subject with the child. When a child or young person is placed or being placed with you, where it is known they are vulnerable due to earlier abuse and resulting behaviours, or they are known to have abused other children, self-harm, regularly abscond or have other higher level concerns or behaviour, the child’s social worker, in conjunction with you should complete a separate child risk assessment looking at their specific needs in and outside of the foster home.

**Other issues to consider**

A health and safety checklist will be completed by the assessing social worker for the foster family and will be reviewed regularly and/or updated whenever there are changes to the property, building work, house moves etc. Any areas of concern should be indicated, and action taken to remedy these concerns.

As part of the Foster Carer Agreement, carers will sign an undertaking not to administer corporal punishment to children and young people in their care. There are alternative management behaviour strategies carers can use when caring for children and setting appropriate boundaries.

You will be expected to complete recordings for each child in placement. Apart from recording important meetings in relation to the child or young person, foster carers will also be expected to record significant incidents or events that occur within the placement, and this might involve issues of a safer caring nature. These must be used in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

You will also need to consider who are regular visitors and whether it would be appropriate for them to sign the family and friend’s document.

There is space in the form to include any other comments, observations, or family rules you would like recorded. You are advised to use this space to record additional family rules which might have been missed above.

Remember the family safer caring policy document is to be kept in a prominent place in your home and should be updated and discussed with all members of your household and every child or young person you care for.

**When you go out**

You have responsibilities towards the children you are looking after and towards those you ask to babysit or look after children. You need to think what you can do to avoid putting everyone at risk.

You should be clear about what your supervising social worker considers are satisfactory arrangements for caring for children when you are out. You could consider arranging with other foster carers.

**Children with disabilities**

Children with a disability may be particularly vulnerable to abuse. There may be more of a need for intimate personal care. Where a child or young person has a disability or complex health needs, you should speak to the child’s social worker for advice.

You should make sure that a child or young people with communication difficulties can express their wishes about personal care, and this should also be recorded.

**Fire plan**

Discuss as a family what routes you will take if a fire starts and practice an evacuation. Think about where keys are kept so everybody knows where they will be for the front and back doors and windows.

**Reviewing the Safe Caring Policy**

All foster families must have a policy in place when we take you to the Fostering Panel for initial approval this will be a general household policy and should be continually reviewed and updated as required.

Each child placed should have their own individualised safer caring policy which is designed to identify their needs and risks and support foster carers to manage these needs and risks, this is designed to safeguard all children and adults in the household.

Safer caring should be regularly reviewed by carers and supervising social workers.

**Standards and regulations**

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011

* Standard 3 – Promoting Positive Behaviour and Relationships
* Standard 4 – Safeguarding Children
* Standard 6 – Promoting Good Health and Wellbeing

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

* Standard 2 – Understand your role as a foster carer
* Standard 6 – Keep children and young people safe from harm
* Standard 7 – Develop yourself

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| Policy date: 16.06.22 |
| Reviewed by Fostering Managers: 16.06.22 |
| Approved by SMT: 27.06.22 |
| Policy Review Date: 27.06.23 |