**Short Stay (also referred to as Respite) Policy and Guidance**

Fostering Policy Development Officer

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Version number** | **Date updated** | **Updated by** | **Review date** |
| Version 1 | 11/08/2023 | Kayte Luton | 11/08/2025 |

Contents

[1. Introduction and Legal Framework 1](#_Toc157434964)

[2. Definitions 2](#_Toc157434965)

[3. Other alternatives to Short Stay Care (also referred to as Respite) 4](#_Toc157434966)

[4. Pre-Planning for Short Stays during the Assessment Process 4](#_Toc157434967)

[5. Process for Arranging Short Stays 6](#_Toc157434968)

[6. Post Short Stays 8](#_Toc157434969)

[7. Record Keeping 8](#_Toc157434970)

[Appendix 1 9](#_Toc157434971)

[Appendix 2 11](#_Toc157434972)

# Introduction and Legal Framework

Standard 21.5 of the National Minimum Standards of Fostering 2011.

See link: [National Minimum Standards of Fostering 2011](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7abe16e5274a319e77a6a1/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf)

states that “Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take into account the needs of any children placed”.

In Somerset, Foster Carers are expected to care for a child/young person as a member of their family and include the child/young person in family holidays. However, planned and agreed additional breaks from fostering, which meet the child/young person’s needs, can be agreed for up to 21 days per year. During these periods the fee and allowance continues to be paid due to the need for the child/young person’s main carer to be able to provide for them throughout the year.

This provision is given to allow children and young people to have a break away from the family, where it has been identified that such support meets the needs of the child/young person and will help to maintain the care arrangement. Planned breaks can be particularly important when looking after children and young people with very complex behaviours and or additional needs. Although this provision is available it should be recognised that moving children and young people can be disruptive and may leave them with a feeling of being left out of the family and it is therefore important to ensure that necessary short stays are arranged in a planned way and facilitated by the Foster Carers support network where possible.

The aim of this policy is to provide guidance and processes around the suitability, purpose, and arrangement of short stays (not to be confused with short breaks which are arranged for children/young people with disabilities).

Some children and young people from Somerset live with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). Somersets expectations are that the principles set out within this document will be used in these situations. Supervising social workers from the IFA will need to plan and liaise with the child or young person’s social worker and IRO and any decisions regarding short stays should be child centred.

Somerset approved Family Assessment & Support Team (FA&ST) foster carers, are not included within the remit of this this policy, due to the short nature of the assessments, and any agreed break from caring will always be arranged between parent and child assessments. In the event of an emergency, or the end date of assessment unexpectedly being moved, which would coincide with an agreed break, an alternative FA&ST Carer or Independent Parent and Child Foster Carer will be found, to cover any short stays required. FA&ST carers may take up to 6 weeks break from caring, between Parent and Child Assessments.

# Definitions

**Short Stays – (sometimes referred to as respite care)**

Carer to carer short stay fostering is when children/young people who are looked after by foster carers, have a temporary stay with other foster carers.

Carer to carer short stay fostering will sometimes be a planned arrangement that is in response to the high care needs of the child or young person. This may include children/young people who require complex care and support. In these circumstances the short stay is put in place to sustain the family arrangement. This is similar for children/young people with disabilities. However, breaks for children/young people with disabilities are not limited to 21 Days and are arranged by the Children with Disabilities Team, in line with the **Short Breaks** Procedures, which can be found here [Short Breaks (proceduresonline.com)](https://www.proceduresonline.com/somerset/cs/p_short_breaks.html?zoom_highlight=short+break). Carers and parents of children/young people with disabilities will be subject to an assessment of needs before **short break/s** can be agreed and arranged, and therefore **do not** fall under the remit of this policy.

Carer to carer short stays will sometimes be provided in an emergency. Emergencies may include the foster carer temporarily being unable to look after the child/ren or young person/people in their care due to their own ill health or other family emergencies, and when it is not suitable for the foster carer’s support network to offer alternative care. It may also be provided if there is at risk of instability in the fostering family.

As already stated, Somerset foster carers may take up to 21 days break from caring per year; this means foster carers can receive foster care payments whilst not caring for children or young people. There may be some circumstances when a child or young person may choose not to go on holiday with their foster carer. In these circumstances it is important to be clear about whether this is an arranged short stay or part of the carer’s 21 day break from caring. If the foster carer is **not** taking any other looked after children/young people/young people on holiday this should be taken as part of their twenty-one days break. It will not be counted as their break, if the foster carer is taking other looked after children/young people with them on holiday (or still have other looked after children/young people at home).

**Support Network Carers**

Foster carers are encouraged to consider their own network of family and friends who may be able to support them in their role of fostering and be able to look after children/young people in foster care, to enable the foster carer to have a break. It may also be suitable to explore options with family members, including birth family, as agreed with the child’s social worker. The use of support network carers, for a short stay for a looked after child/young person is akin to an arrangement a ‘good parent’ might make for a birth child. In such circumstances, the main approved foster carer(s) retains responsibility for the child(ren) or young person/people during the period of care when they are being looked after by the support network carer/s. The main foster carer(s) must be available in an emergency and be contactable on the telephone, in line with the expectations made of good parents. The support network carer does not need to be approved as a foster carer to provide this. Paragraph 3.23 of the Fostering Statutory Guidance 2011 states:

“*There is no requirement that where a looked after child visits or spends a holiday with their foster carer’s friends or relative that the individual must be approved as a local authority foster carer, as the child will remain formally placed with their usual foster carers*”.

If foster carers are arranging for a child or young person to stay with their approved support network carer/s overnight, they should still inform the supervising social worker and social worker of the child/young person, so they are aware on each occasion that the child/young person is away from the foster family overnight. If this is arranged in an emergency, then the social worker and supervising social worker should be informed as soon as possible. support network carers will have been approved for overnight stays via the support network carer form/process, which includes any necessary DBS checks and Delegated Authority.

If foster carers are looking after children/young people who have complex health needs that require specialist health care training, the support network carer should also have this training before the child or young person can stay with them.

# Other alternatives to Short Stay Care (also referred to as Respite)

Foster carers should also be encouraged to consider other options which may allow for them to have a break without the child or young person feeling like they are being ‘rejected’ to and have to go to an alternative foster carer. There may be options of residential holidays – which may be following an interest the child or young person already has e.g. activity holidays or holidays through organisations that they are already involved in e.g. cadets/scouts/brownies etc.

# Pre-Planning for Short Stays during the Assessment Process

Short stay care should be discussed during the assessment and approval process of foster carers. This should include the use of support network carers and whether there are people who could care for the child/young person if there was an emergency in the fostering household. The assessment should also include whether there are potential support network carers who would be prepared to have children and young people go and stay with them if, for example, the carers go on holiday.

This information about support network carers would be included in the fostering assessment but should also be included in the contingency plan section of the case summary on the carer’s file, so if there was an emergency and the Emergency Duty Team became involved, they could access the information quickly.

**When matching a child/young person to a foster family**

When matching a child/young person to a foster family, every effort should be made to ensure that a child or young person is not placed in a foster family who have an imminent holiday planned, which they would not be able to participate in. If a holiday is booked, and it is possible for a child/young person to join the foster family on holiday then there needs to be discussion as to whether it is appropriate for the child/young person and whether there needs to be any adjustment of the child/young person’s safer care plan e.g. different sleeping arrangements may need to be considered. If it is appropriate, then the child or young person’s views should be sought and that of the parent or anyone else with parental responsibility. This should be discussed fully and confirmed **before** the child joins the foster family, to prevent the need for further moves, should arrangements for the holiday not work out.

When the requirement for regular short stays is identified and agreed at the point when the child or young person moves to the foster carers, this should be recorded on the carers electronic record and also in the Placement Plan which becomes part of the care plan for the child/young person. This should not be changed due to any changes in social worker or teams. However, the child/young person’s social worker may review and change the plan for arranged short stays, if the needs of the child/young person require it. Any changes that are made to this arrangement should be agreed with the IRO and consideration should be given to minimising instability and supporting the fostering arrangement. The foster carers should be consulted, views fully considered, and must be told of any changes and the reasons for the change.

The use of short stay care **MUST** be child/young person focused and there are some situations when it may not be appropriate. This includes the following:

• Any children placed who are under 5 years old.

• Children and young people where there are particular attachment difficulties.

• Bridging to adoption placements.

When matching children /young people with foster carers the Home Finding Officer/Home Team must be clear with the carer/s, about the circumstances in which short stays would not be appropriate, and that the expectation is that those children/young people will not have short stays unless there are exceptional circumstances.

There may also be situations where a child or young person may request a break away from their carer and the reasons for this should be carefully considered.

**Delegated Authority**

Delegated Authority should be discussed at the child’/young person’s initial Placement Planning Meeting. It is recommended that at this meeting short stay care is discussed and agreement is sought from all relevant parties for when/if the child goes to stay with another carer, family member or friend. This should then be recorded on the delegated authority document.

# Process for Arranging Short Stays

The request for short stay may come from different forums. It may be agreed as part of an initial agreement for the child or young person; it may be agreed as part of a support plan from a Stability Meeting, it may be a planned break for the foster carer, or it could be an emergency situation. The basic principle is the sooner the request is made the better it will be for all concerned.

Some foster carers when planning for their break may consult with another foster carer whom they use for short stays and is known to the children/young people. We do not wish to stop this happening, as it means that the foster carer is likely to be able to arrange their holiday, at a time when it fits in with the other carer; and this is likely to be in the best interests of the child/young person. However, although these preliminary discussions can be useful it is not a means for formally agreeing the short stay breaks and the following procedure should be followed:

The supervising social worker needs to be informed of the request. In most circumstances the foster carer will be the person to inform the supervising social worker when they are planning to use part of their 21 day break from caring.

The supervising social worker should then contact the child/young person’s social worker and seek out their agreement for the short stay.

The child/young person’s social worker or supervising social worker (depending on who the request is coming from) should complete a short stay care checklist (Appendix 1). This should then be uploaded onto the child/young person’s electronic record and the foster carer’s electronic record.

The Supervising social worker is responsible for finding an appropriate short stay carer, following agreement with the child/young person’s social worker.

The short stay must be agreed prior to it taking place, by the child/young person’s social worker/team manager or duty social worker. If the break is planned, it should be arranged taking into consideration the situation for the particular child/young person and carer.

Once the decision has been agreed, this should be recorded by the supervising social worker in a case note on LCS and the case summary updated on the foster carer’s file. This should include details of the short stay carer and dates of the short stay. This information then needs to be sent to the child/young person’s social worker for saving on the child/young person’s file.

Every effort should be made to organise a meeting with both the main carer and short stay carer, to ensure that important information about the child/young person is shared. Placement planning should always incorporate short stay arrangements and agreements where possible and reviewed as necessary. If a child or young person is having regular short stays with the same carer a Placement Planning Meeting can include a series of stays and any updates can be passed on at the time.

If a meeting between the short stay carer and the main carer cannot be convened due to an emergency situation, as much information about the child/young person, must be passed on to the short stay foster carer at the time of the stay, e.g. contact arrangements, medical information and routines for the child or young person, the Child’s Safer Care Plan (if appropriate), any risk assessment in place for the child and ideally the Short Stay Information Sheet (Appendix 2), should be completed and given to the short stay/support network carer.

In both planned and emergency short stays, Delegated Authority should be agreed. This may be agreed when the child or young person is first placed with the main carer, and the parent agrees the same delegated authority is given to a short stay/support network carer. If this has not been agreed previously a new agreement must be set up, so the short stay carer knows what authority they have, to make any decisions that are required.

If the short stay is arranged in an emergency, attempts should be made to place the child with someone that the child or young person already knows and has a positive relationship with. It is therefore important to be clear on the file if a child or young person has been with other carers and how the arrangement worked for the child. This information should be included in the case summary of the child/young person’s file. This information can then be used when considering alternative carers.

If a short stay is arranged in an emergency the child or young person should, as a minimum, have been shown a copy of the carers profile which provides some photos and information about where they are being moved to.

If the short stay is a planned, arrangements should be made for the child/young person to visit the carer’s home and be able to meet them and see the bedroom where they will be sleeping.

The supervising social worker to ensure that the Placement Information Sheet (Appendix 2) has been completed by/in collaboration with the main foster carers and given to the short stay carer/support network carer/s.

If the child/young person has any specialist health care needs; the short stay/support network carer/s should have received the appropriate training to safely care for the child before the short stay takes place. In an emergency, the social worker/ supervising social worker must refer short stay/support network carer for emergency specialist health care training from the CWD Team; so that they can arrange to visit the carer and give them the training/instruction that they need.

If it is expected that the child or young person will be sharing a bedroom during their short stay, the supervising social worker should complete a Bedroom Sharing Risk Assessment (sometimes incorporated in the Safer Care Plan), this is completed in conjunction with the social workers of any children/young people who are involved. If the bedroom assessment has already been completed for the child’s current home and the short stay does not involve any additional children, then it does not need to be completed again for the short stay arrangement.

If by placing a child or young person with a carer for short stay means that the carer has more than 3 children/young people (that aren’t siblings), then an exemption to foster beyond the fostering limit is required (see exemption process). In addition to this, if the arrangement is outside of the carer’s terms of approval, a change of approval will need to be sought from the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and should be presented to panel beforehand, wherever possible. In emergency situations, the nominated officer (Operations Manager for Fostering) can agree an out of approval for up to 6 days. The appropriate form on LCS should be forwarded to the Operations Manager for consideration.

The supervising social worker of the foster carer is responsible for arranging payments for short stays. These should be completed as soon as possible to avoid any delay to foster carers payments.

# Post Short Stays

When the short stay has ended and the child/young person has returned to their main carer, it is important that information is obtained about how the stay went and should be recorded on the child/young person’s and foster carer/s files.

This information should also be included in the foster carer’s annual review.

If any issues come up from discussions with either the main foster carer, the short stay foster carer or the child or young person, then the relevant supervising social worker and child/young person’s social worker should discuss as soon as it is known, so any follow up can be completed in a timely way.

The IRO should discuss any short stay arrangements in the next review and when they next see the child or young person on their own.

# Record Keeping

The supervising social worker of both the main carer and the short stay carer should discuss the arrangement in the next supervision session.

The short stay foster carer should also complete foster carers logs for the duration of the stay with them. The main foster carer should also record in their logs if the child or young person has given any feedback regarding the short stay.

# Appendix 1

**SHORT STAY REQUEST INFORMATION CHECK LIST**

**Supervising Social Worker and Fostering Team:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Name of Child/Young Person requiring short stay:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Date of Birth of Child/Young Person:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Social Worker and Team of Child/Young Person:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Independent Reviewing Officer:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Name and Address of main Foster Carer short stay:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Date short stay required:**

From: ……………………………………………………………………

To: ……………………………………………………………………

**Reason short stay is requested:**

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

**Is the short stay part of the foster carers maximum 21 days break?** (please see policy above for conditions)

……………………………………………………………………

**Were short stays discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting and Delegated Authority granted?**

……………………………………………………………………

**Section of Children Act 1989 (e.g. section 20 or ICO/full care order) the child/young person is placed under?**

……………………………………………………………………

**Date requested from social worker:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Date request agreed:**

……………………………………………………………………

**Name and address of foster carer providing short stay: (If already arranged)**

……………………………………………………………………

**Are any children/young people sharing a bedroom which has not already been assessed (this may be incorporated in safe care plan)? If so, has the risk assessment been completed?**

……………………………………………………………………

**Any specific information about Child/Young person requiring short stays that should be considered when matching- (e.g. health needs, communication difficulties, additional carer training required)**

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

# Appendix 2

**Short Stay/Support Network Carer to Carer Information Sheet**

***This form should be shared with the short stay/support network carer, along with any other relevant information such as - child’s safer care plan, missing risk assessment etc***

**Full Name of Child/YP**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**Known by any other name?**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**Date of Birth**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**YP/ Child’s Social worker, team & contact details.**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**Who to contact in emergency?**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**GP/Consultant details**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**Dentist details**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

***Main Carer(s)***

***Carer’s Name (s)***

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

***Carer’s Address & telephone numbers***

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

***Please add any other information about the child or young person that you think might be useful to know, such as:***

* **any special needs i.e. educational, learning, physical, health (any medications), allergies, methods of communication?**
* **specific requirements relating to religion, culture, identity, diet (including likes and dislikes)?**
* **any risks, other than those identified in the Child’s Safer Caring Plan, names of people that the child should not have contact with, risk of absconding/going missing?**
* **arrangements for contact, school, transport, activities/hobbies, playdates, medical appointments, curfews, screen time, use of social media etc**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**

**…………………………………………………………………………………………**