**Support Network Suitability Process**

Fostering Policy and Project Development Officer

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# Introduction and Purpose

As a foster carer, it is important to recognise the role that extended family and friends will play within the fostering household, and to what extent they are able to step in and support with the fostering role.

We recognise that the level and frequency of support that family and friends are able to offer, will vary from family to family and may change over time. However, having a clear understanding of who, within the foster carers support network is able to support and what that support will look like before it is required, can be really helpful. Additionally, helping to build strong, supportive relationships between looked after children and young people and the foster carers support network can help them feel part of the wider fostering family.

As part of the assessment of applicants who wish to foster and kinship/connected carers, any extended family members or friends within the carers support network, who will provide regular care to any looked after child will need to have a support carer, will need to have a support carers form completed prior to their panel.

The form does not replace the need for a full fostering assessment for carers wishing to be short stay/respite carers. However, it is a mechanism, when needed, where we can quality assure arrangements, identify development and training needs, and provide the fostering family and network with support.

It will also allow us to support the wider fostering family and instigate thought of wider ‘family fostering’ rather than the need for respite with approved foster carers, that the child/ren may not know.

# What can my support network help with?

Support and care from the wider support network can take on many forms. Some examples of ways in which family and friends can help with the fostering role include:

Information taken from the Action For Children website: [How friends and family support foster carers | Action For Children](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/how-we-can-help/foster-with-us/fostering-and-adoption-blogs/the-unsung-heroes-in-fostering-five-ways-friends-and-family-support-fostering-families/)

1. **Being there at short notice**

If life throws up an emergency or an unplanned event, having a known emergency contact to rely on can help foster carers and children feel more at ease.

**2. Helping children feel part of the family**

When friends and family get involved with helping a looked after child feel part of the family, it’s a chance to build new friendships for the child. The more positive role models a child has, the greater the impact on their self-esteem and their own sense of identity.

**3. Emotional support**

Having family and friends available to offer emotional support to both the foster carer and looked after child/young person, can be the most valuable form of support. This could even be as little as a reassuring ear on the end of the phone after a difficult day.

**4. Taking children/young people out**

Adults within the support network can get involved by taking children/young people out, away from the foster carer’s home. This allows the foster carer and child/young person to have a break and helps them feel part of the wider family. This could be for short periods, or longer, overnight stays.

**5. Support with homework**

For lots of children/young people, homework can be a struggle. If a friend or relative with the necessary knowledge or experience can step in to help, it can relieve some pressure from the foster carer and be a nice break for the young person to have someone other than the foster carer supporting them.

Family and friends provide a vital pillar of support during times of need. Building a support network around you is a key part of fostering. It also allows some you time for yourself, too.

**6. Arranged short stays**

Arranged overnight stays with the support carer, either at the support carers home, the foster carers home or any other accommodation, can offer a form of respite to the foster carer and a break away from home for the child or young person.

This list is not exhaustive, there are other ways in which family and friends can help to support the foster carer and young person.

# Completing the Support Network Suitability Form

The support network suitability form is to be used to identify which members of the wider family or friends within the carers support network are willing and able to offer support or alternative one off, or regular babysitting and what that support will look like.

Prospective carers will be asked to consider this as part of their initial assessment. However, it is accepted that a foster carers support network of family and friends, or the extent of any support that can be given may change over time; and therefore, this form can be revisited and reviewed at any point throughout the carers fostering career. Discussion around a foster carer’s support network and alternative care arrangements for any looked after child/young person can also be revisited during supervision.

Relevant information and the supervising social worker’s analysis of the support network suitability form/s will be detailed within the foster carer’s assessment to fostering panel. Any subsequent additions or amendments to the form will be considered by a fostering manager or within the foster carer’s annual review paperwork.

During completion of this form, it is anticipated that there will be an initial visit to the homes of all named individuals within the support network, who will be regularly caring for looked after children/young people in their home/s, and annually thereafter.

For families who have a complex history, it may be necessary for a more in-depth observation and assessment of their circumstances, to ascertain the extent of any impact to the looked after child/young person. Any further assessment of a support network carer will be made on a case-by-case basis and at the discretion of the supervising social worker and or relevant manager.

The support network suitability form should also be completed for any approved foster carers who wish to use family and friends’ carers on a regular basis. It should be completed prior to the arrangement taking place and be presented to the relevant manager for agreement.

The support network suitability form will consider the child/young person’s wishes and feelings about being cared for by any identified support carer, as well as the child’s social worker and reviewing officer.

The support network suitability form will be updated by the supervising social worker, if the child’s wishes and feelings have changed or were not previously recorded, following an occasion when the child/ren have been cared for by the support carers.

During completion of the support network suitability form the assessing/supervising social worker will consider what information about the child and safer caring practises should be shared with the support carer. However, any new or updating relevant information should be provided on each occasion that the support carer has sole care of the looked after child or young person. In the first instance this should be shared by the foster carer, with guidance from the supervising social worker if necessary. The support carer must always keep the child’s information confidential and ensure that any information about the child is not further disclosed.

# Financial Recompense

Somerset Council cannot make a payment to anyone other than the looked after child’s foster carer. However, we can consider on a discretionary basis, making additional payments to the foster carer to support an arrangement that benefits the care of the child, for example to pay for additional costs associated with the stay, such as activities or food etc. Any additional payments must be agreed by the appropriate manager in advance.

# Training

All support network carers will have the option to access the Skills to Foster training, as well as any further training which has been identified on a **needs** basis by either the assessing social worker or the foster carer’s supervising social worker. This may include but is not limited to training for any child that has a disability or additional need, specific medical training, health and safety, Safer Caring or First Aid. Please note that training spaces on some courses may be limited, and therefore spaces may be prioritised for foster carers or staff.

# Specific Household

The suitability of a support carer is considered for the for specific fostering family, for which they have been identified. They cannot provide support or alternative care to any other fostering family.

# Appendix

**RESTRICTED**

**Suitability Form - Foster Carer’s Support Network**

To be used if approved Somerset Foster Carers wish to regularly use wider family members or friends, who are well known to the fostering family and CLA for regular babysitting, or overnight stays as part of the childcare plan for a looked after child, and under delegated authority. This should be completed during the fostering assessment where possible.

1. **Name of Foster Carer’s Support Carer/s:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name (inc any previous names)** | **D.O.B** | **Address** | **Telephone No** | **Email** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

1. **Occupation and Address of Employment:**

Other household members’ names and D.O.B:

*Please include anybody who is likely to visit regularly when the child is present, especially if staying overnight. Please see* [DBS checks\_Sept 2021.docx (live.com)](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2021-09%2FDBS%2520checks_Sept%25202021.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK), for eligibility criteria for enhanced/basic DBS, which depends on regulated activity and frequency.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **D.O.B** | **DBS required (yes/No)** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

1. **Relationship to foster carers:** *- include each member of the support carer household, as appropriate:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Relationship** | **Time known** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**4. Proposed level of care offered by support carer(s) and other members of support carers household:**

*Please state whether the proposal to offer alternative/support care is permanent or temporary, on an emergency basis or more regular. What would the likely duration be? Will it be overnight or just day care, and where will the care take place?*

1. **Sleeping Arrangements**

*If the child is staying overnight, what are the proposed sleeping arrangements? Will the child have their own bedroom, or is a bedroom sharing risk assessment needed?*

1. **Pets, Animals and Livestock**

*Are there any animals at the support carer’s property and is a pet/dog risk assessment required?*

1. **Basic Health and Safety Risk Check**

The Assessing Social Worker/Supervising Social Worker/Senior Social Work Assistant will need to visit the home and carry out basic health and safety checks.

*Is the accommodation suitable? What if any, (based on our Health and Safety Risk Assessment) H&S risks have been identified? e.g looking at seasonality in respect of gardens, ponds, water features and containers that may collect water etc*

**8. The health and capacity of the support carer to provide short break or regular care.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Does the support carer have any current or previous health concerns that would impact on their capacity to care?  *Discuss physical and mental health conditions.* | Yes No | Low risk  Medium risk  High risk |
| *Additional information:* | | |
| Is the support carer taking any medication? | Yes No | Low risk  Medium risk  High risk |
| *Additional information:* | | |
| Does the support carer or any other member of their household smoke? | Yes No | Low risk  Medium risk  High risk |
| *Additional information:* | | |
| Does the support carer or anyone in the household drink alcohol or use drugs?  *Also discuss whether alcohol is stored in the home and where?* | Yes No | Low risk  Medium risk  High risk |
| *Additional information:* | | |

9. **Support Carers understanding of the specific needs of the looked after child**

*Discuss their understanding of health, behaviour, dietary needs, cultural, religious, identity and sexual health and safety.*

**10.If appropriate, views, wishes and feelings of any other children in support carer household and fostering household.**

**11. If appropriate, wishes and feelings of the looked after child/ren.**

**12. Views of the Child’s Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer.**

**13. Actions/Checks required:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Written consent from support carers/other family members to complete necessary checks | Yes No | Date: |
| DBS Checks for support carers and other family members as necessary | Yes No | Date: |
| Local Authority (LCS) Check/other LA’s | Yes No | Date: |
| Driving Licence/Insurance for all who will be transporting children | Yes No | Date: |
| Other checks as deemed appropriate (please provide details) | Yes No | Date: |
| Discussion of Safer caring | Yes No | Date: |
| *Further information/details:* |  |  |

**14. Assessing Social Worker/Supervising Social Worker’s recommendation:**

***Based on the information above, I recommend that ……………….. ………………………………………………………………………………………..is/are permitted to provide care in the capacity of a support carer only as outlined in section 3 above. Any proposed change to the level/frequency or duration of care must be approved by the supervising social worker.*** (Arrangements should be discussed with the child/young person’s social worker and agreed upon).

It is the responsibility of the Foster carer(s) and the support carer to inform the Supervising Social Worker if there are any changes to any of the above information, recorded on this form.

15. **Support carers should be encouraged to undertake first aid training at the earliest opportunity/Skills to Foster and other relevant training as deemed appropriate.**

*What if any training has been identified as appropriate?*

**16. Sharing of Information:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Child Risk Assessment shared with support carers *(only relevant information should be shared):* | Date: |
| Safer Caring Family Agreement and Child’s plan shared with support carers *(only relevant information from Safer Caring documents should be shared):* | Date: |

**17. Reviewing this Support Carer Form:**

This support carer form will need to be reviewed at each Foster Carer Annual Review and at the time a child comes to live with the carers if applicable, and if there are any significant changes.

Signed

Support Carer/s: ­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Assessing/Supervising Social Worker: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Team Manager: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_