**Identity Policy**

**Standards and Regulations**

**Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:**

* [Standard 2 - Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_two.html).

**Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:**

* [Standard 1 - Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* [Standard 4 - Know how to communicate effectively](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf).

Also see [Keeping Memories](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/keeping_memories.html).

1. **Introduction**

In order to understand other people’s identity, we need to understand our own. This helps us to identify whether there are differences between us and the children that we care for and their families and whether there are gaps that can be bridged. You and your family should try and spend some time thinking about this before you start caring.

A person’s identity is important, particularly so for black and minority ethnic children, and can be made up of a mixture of the things below:

* How we look including our skin colour;
* How we dress;
* How we sound and the language that we speak;
* Our views;
* Our family values and traditions;
* Our religious beliefs;
* Our family history and background;
* How we form relationships, including our sexual orientation.

As part of your caring role it is important for you to develop and help to promote a child/young person’s identity. It is vital that you uphold and encourage a child’s identity particularly when they are not living with their own family or else it will weaken their sense of who they are.

Within our own culture, we often do this without thinking or meaning to by assuming that what we do is the same as everybody else. The way in which we celebrate Christmas/Eid is an example of this.

Our understanding is helped by understanding the child/young person’s background and should be addressed in the [Placement Plan](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/placement_plan.html) at the start of their time in your family home about how this will be done.

Where children are placed with you from different backgrounds or cultures, the fostering service will provide additional training and support and information. This will make sure that the child/young person receives the best possible care to develop a positive understanding of their background and heritage.

1. **Principles**

* The well-being of individual children must be at the centre of your practice. All children's achievements must be celebrated and appropriately rewarded;
* The children's day-to-day needs must be met, such as routine, privacy, personal space and nutritious meals. Children must be treated with dignity and respect;
* The children must experience care that is sensitive and responsive to their identity and family history, including age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation;
* The care of children is reviewed regularly and it is ensured that the care plan is being met;
* If any specific type or model of care is required, you will be suitably trained and supervised;
* Specialist help will be made available according to the individual needs of children, including those who live away from their 'home' authority. This help will be available as soon as it is needed, at the intensity required and for as long as it is required. If specialist services from elsewhere are not available, or children are waiting for a long time for help, the Fostering Service will be proactive in challenging and escalating concerns with the placing authority and/or other partners;
* The service will support to secure appropriate assessments for adaptations and equipment required to meet additional needs of children and young people
* Children must be protected, and helped to keep themselves safe, from bullying, homophobic behaviour, racism, sexism, radicalisation and other forms of discrimination. Any discriminatory behaviours must be challenged and help and support given to children about how to treat others with respect.

1. **Culture**

Culture is part of a child’s/young person’s identity and heritage. All foster carers should respect and value a child’s cultural heritage.

Culture describes the way people live their lives. Culture is based on many different factors, memories, common experience, background, language, racial identity, class, religion and family attitudes etc.

Sometimes conflicts arise in foster homes between the way you are used to living and the ways that the child/young person is used to living. Dilemmas arise about what is the right thing to do. When a young person doesn’t want to follow the way that is expected of them, there are rarely easy answers when sorting these problems out. Examples can be as simple as eating at the table, or religious observance. You should talk to the child and their family (where appropriate) to try and understand what their views are and find a way forward. Your supervising social worker and/or the child’s social worker can also provide help.

1. **Language**

It is possible that a child whose first language is not English may be placed with you.

Language is an important part of a child’s identity and culture. Every effort should be made to preserve a child’s linguistic and communication skills; otherwise they may lose a large part of their culture.

If you need more information or advice about a child’s cultural and linguistic needs, contact the child’s social worker or your supervising social worker.

You should look for ways in which you can promote the child’s identity. Discuss this with your supervising social worker and the child’s social worker. This information will be important should the child return home or move to another carer.

1. **Providing Care for Black and Minority Ethnic Children**

Black and minority ethnic children will have particular practical needs in relation to their identity. Their hair and skin care may be different, toys and educational material such as books and DVDs and birthday cards should reflect black people, culture and identity in a positive way. These will promote a positive sense of identity.

When the child comes to live with you, it may be useful to talk to the child’s birth family or their social worker about the kind of things that are important to them and that they may be used to having in the family home. This may be to do with food or it may be their skin and hair care. You could find out how to cook particular dishes and introduce them to the rest of the family which also helps to extend their understanding and experiences.

Skin care is generally important to everyone but is really important to black children as their skin may be naturally dry and need to be moisturised regularly, particularly more so in winter months. You should try and find out what they already use or try oil based products e.g. cocoa butter.

Hair care for black children and mixed heritage children is different to European children and should generally only be washed once a week and will usually need special products. Again try and talk to either the birth family or the child’s social worker for specific details. Some children because of religious beliefs should not have their hair cut e.g. Rastafarians and Sikhs.

1. **Religion**

The religious upbringing of a child or young person in care is very important.

The right to determine the child's religion is one of the rights all birth parents retain regardless of the reason the child comes to live with you.

Some parents may express strong preferences, but when they do this is usually reflected in the choice of a foster family for the child.

1. **Disability**

A child/young person’s disability is a part of who they are and the arrangements that are made to meet their needs are a part of respecting their identity.

1. **Gender Identity**

Some young people may identify as transgender (i.e. as a different gender from their birth gender) or as non-binary (they may not identify as either male or female). Girls, boys and transgender/non-binary young people should receive equal opportunities and encouragement to pursue their talents, interests and hobbies.

Sexist stereotypes of behaviour must not be imposed or condoned, for example there should be equal expectations that boys and girls will participate in domestic tasks.

Young people who are experiencing gender identity issues should, in general, be given space and support to develop their own gender identity. However, it is important that they are protected from adverse effects such as bullying and discrimination.

Some young people may wish to discuss specialist medical intervention, or may require specialist support. Discuss this with your supervising social worker and the child’s social worker.

1. **Living in a Positive Environment**

It is useful to think about all the things a child or young person comes into contact with. For example, toys, books and posters. Do they have positive images of children who are from a different race or who have a disability?

This may seem like a small thing but it can have a big impact on a child if, for instance, all they see are images of white children and they are black, this is also important for things like birthday cards.