

Fostering

Assessment of Pets

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.

Assessment of Pets

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

[Regulation 11 - Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare](#)

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards:

[STANDARD 13 - Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children](#)

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Key Risk Assessment Issues
3. Assessment of Pets
4. Positive Aspects of Pet Ownership

1. Introduction

For prospective foster carers who are pet owners, a risk assessment should be undertaken with the focus on the safety of the child being paramount. The assessment should also take account of the potential benefits to a child being placed. Where the prospective foster carers own a dangerous/banned dog see [GOV.UK website](#): they will not be considered unless they agree to the removal of the dog.

Matching a child with approved foster carers who are dog/pet owners will need to take account of the child's history, possible fear of dogs or other animals, or ill treatment of animals and the child's particular needs or allergies. Careful consideration and assessment should be given to the number of pets/dogs in particular, households where there are packs of dogs (more than 2).

If an approved foster carer acquires a dangerous/banned dog, their approval would need to be terminated if s/he was not prepared to cease ownership.

2. Key Risk Assessment Issues

This issue should be approached from a health and safety perspective and a risk assessment conducted. Key points to consider are:

- How and where are the dogs or animals to be kept?
- Will they be accessible to the foster child in anyway?
- What will be the risks to the health and safety of the foster child?
- The prospective foster carer should be asked how s/he would feel and react if their dog/animals were 'hurt' by a foster child?

- What are the arrangements for toileting and cleaning up after the dog? What are the arrangements for worming? These areas can have implications for the health of children.

A vet may be called in as part of the assessment process.

As part of the assessment/review, consideration should also be given to the breeding of animals and or working animals in relation to the impact of the welfare of the child/young person.

3. Assessment of Pets

The safety of the child to be placed should be paramount. It is the responsibility of the prospective foster carer to demonstrate the pet's ability to cope with children and that s/he has a responsible attitude and good understanding of the issues involved. Responsible pet owners should not mind a check being made on the pet, as well as a check on their suitability to be carers.

It is important to know whether the pet has lived with children, still lives with children or has any experience of children. The prospective carer should be asked, 'Was this experience positive?'.

The size of a pet is important, especially where vulnerable children are involved. If there is any doubt about the suitability of a pet, expert opinion should be sought from a vet or the RSPCA.

It should be borne in mind that all dogs have the potential to be dangerous and that children can provoke attacks from dogs. Foster carers must be able to supervise both the child and dog to prevent dangerous situations arising.

There may be the need for a Dog Assessment to be undertaken, which can also lead to a Vet Assessment. A link to this form can be found [here](#).

Other animals may be kept by foster carers and these will be considered on an individual basis during the assessment.

4. Positive Aspects of Pet Ownership

Whilst carrying out a risk assessment of a prospective carer's pet, the obvious potential benefits of a pet matched appropriately with a child in placement should also be taken into account, which include:

- A source of companionship and unconditional affection;
- An element in a secure family base;
- Exploring taking responsibility and caring;
- Emotional repair work for some children who have experienced rejection, neglect or abuse.

Further Advice

You may wish to look at the [GOV.UK website](#) which has information on Banned Dogs.