

Foster Parents' Charter and Professional Code of Conduct

The foster parents' charter represents a commitment by the agency and the foster parent to work in partnership in the best interests of the children. It is a promise to strive for best practice at all times.

ISP's role

ISP aims to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. We will recruit, train and approve foster parents and deliver ongoing support to them, in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. In this way, ISP provides stable and loving homes while the children are part of the foster family.

The foster parent's role

Foster parents look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family relationship. The stability, care and love provided by foster parents helps the child to achieve recovery and healing from past trauma and promotes resilience in order for the child to realise their full potential.

A foster parent's relationship with other members of the team around the child, which may include birth parents, should be based on mutual trust and respect.

What our foster parents can expect from ISP

1. Working in partnership

At ISP, we recognise the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood. We will:

- Value foster parents' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Recognise that foster parents, who live with the children every day, usually know them best.

- Listen to, involve foster parents and their foster children in decision-making and planning
- Include foster parents in meetings that affect them and the children they care for.
- Ensure that our fostering service complies with fostering regulations and guidance.
- Treat foster parents without discrimination and respect them as colleagues.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Treat foster parents with openness, fairness and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster parents to provide care that meets the child's needs. We will:

- Share all information we have about the child in order to care for them safely.
- Provide this information before placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements.
- Provide foster parents and their foster children with full information about each other.
- Help foster parents to access information on financial matters, including tax and allowances.
- Provide foster parents with full details of our policies and procedures.
- Provide our foster parents with information about a wide variety of topics relevant to child development and fostering, through our Foster Parent Handbook and I-SPACE website.

3. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the children in their care. We will:

- Ensure we have a robust induction process for new foster parents.
- Be clear when making placements about the continuing care or support there will be (including for the child into adulthood), sensitive to the needs of the foster parent and the child in making and ending placements and have contingency plans should the placement not work.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support, including respite and out-of-hours support.
- Provide foster parents with regular supervision and phone contact.

- Provide foster parents with a centre-based support network that includes opportunities to discuss experiences with fellow foster parents, fostering advisors, therapists and advisory teachers.
- Give foster parents open and honest feedback.
- Pay foster parents' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Support foster parents when facilitating contact with birth families.
- Recognise and champion the contribution that foster parents and their families make to fostering.

4. Learning and development

We believe foster parents must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster. We will:

- Ensure all foster parents have a Personal Development Plan.
- Provide foster parents and their family with appropriate, accessible and relevant training by trainers who understand fostering.
- Support foster parents to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around them.
- Continue to provide all foster parents with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

5. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster parents have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances. We will:

- Consult with foster parents before changing terms and conditions.
- Ensure honesty and openness in all our discussions and communications with foster parents.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support, and adhere to agreed timescales.
- Ensure that foster parents are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation.
- Ensure that foster parents know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

6. Communication and consultation

We believe that an open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship. We will:

- Ensure that we consult with foster parents in a meaningful way on matters that affect them.
- Give foster parents timely feedback from consultations.
- Provide clear information on how foster parents can give us feedback and report concerns.
- Continue to consult with foster parents via the Foster Carer Forum meetings and Advisory Board meetings

What we expect from our foster parents

1. Working in partnership

Our foster parents must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct, and maintain collaborative relationships with the team at ISP and children's social workers. Foster parents will:

- Provide children with a positive experience of family life.
- Attend meetings about the children and young people they care for.
- Work with the people and agencies involved with the child, such as their social worker, school, health professionals and churches.
- Work with birth parents, wider family and any other significant people in the child's life.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance*.
- Follow ISP's policies and procedures.
- Make records and submit recordings using the agency's 'Charms' database.
- Discuss any difficulties with the supervising social worker or other members of the ISP team.
- Discuss any concerns they have about the child with the supervising social worker or other members of the ISP team.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Maintain an open dialogue with the ISP team and work to the best of their ability.
- When and where appropriate, enable fostered children to use any special programmes provided by ISP in education, sport, recreation, the arts, holidays, therapy, counselling, job search, employment training etc.

*https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential. Foster parents will:

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child – understanding their needs, supporting their growth, becoming an advocate and champion for them, and keeping in contact with them when they move on.
- Care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity – including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as they would their own child.
- Support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Help young people to develop life skills and transition to independence.
- Provide young people with pocket money. Appropriate amounts are set each year in the Foster Parent Finance Handbook.
- Support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Transport children and young people to and from school, therapy and contact, unless other arrangements have been agreed with the local authority.
- Advocate for all aspects of the child's development, including educational attainment and physical and emotional health and wellbeing.
- Support their foster child to help them to counter possible bullying and discrimination as a result of their care status

3. Learning, development and support

Foster parents must access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career in line with the needs of the children they are caring for. This will ensure that they have the skills and knowledge they need to develop their practice and help transform the lives of the children they foster. Foster parents will:

- Be willing and able to develop their skills throughout their fostering career.
- Attend relevant training.
- Cancel training bookings in good time if they are subsequently unable to attend.
- Attend and contribute to support groups.
- Engage in reflective practice groups and therapeutic consultation.

Professional Code of Conduct

Safeguarding

- You must follow the agency's policies, procedures and guidelines at all times. These are available on our CHARMS system and within the Foster Parent Handbook on the I-SPACE website*
- If you are aware of an incident or allegation of harm/risk of harm to a child or young person, you must report this immediately to the agency. The incident will then be investigated within our safeguarding procedures.

Communication

- You should be available throughout the day to reply to queries or requests from ISP or other professionals, and respond to the needs of the child.
- You should reply to correspondence received (written, electronic or telephone) in a timely manner.
- As a representative of ISP, your communication with others should be polite and friendly at all times.
- Your recordings on 'Charms' must be written in a professional, factual, therapeutic and reflective manner, remembering that children can request at any time to see recordings made about them.
- Respect confidentiality at all times – don't share information with those who don't need to know. This applies to all information, whether it be about children and young people, foster parents or agency colleagues.
- As a general rule, you should have respect for other people's viewpoints if they differ to yours. However, we must all challenge discriminatory language and behaviour.
- Never make/encourage others to make unprofessional personal comments that may scapegoat/demean/humiliate or embarrass others.
- If you are unhappy about any agency matter, you should raise this with your supervising social worker. Complaints or serious concerns should be raised through the appropriate complaints/whistleblowing procedure. Casual 'gossip' is not acceptable and can lead to breaches of confidentiality and miscommunication.

- If you use any social media websites/apps you are advised to apply the privacy setting to control who will see your posts. You must not discuss confidential agency matters online as this could lead to a breach of data protection laws or cause reputational damage.
- The email address that you use for fostering communication must be appropriate to your professional foster carer status. In addition, the email address you use for fostering must be a personal one and not one connected with other employment.
- Relationships between foster parents, children, young people and birth families must be open and professional with no secret contact or personal/intimate sexual relationships.
- Where foster parents and ISP staff have personal friendships outside of work this should be disclosed to line managers/registered managers to protect against allegations of favouritism/unfair treatment.

Behaviour

- You are expected to attend meetings punctually, and give timely apologies for any unavoidable absence or delay. This includes agency training events.
- You should always be appropriately dressed for the situation. In particular, avoid clothing that could be viewed as offensive, revealing or distracting; choose clothing that is free from contentious slogans or images; and avoid items that may be considered discriminatory or culturally inappropriate.
- Avoid any action that might lead a reasonable person to question your suitability to work with children/act as a role model.
- Always conduct yourself in a professional manner in meetings, training and when in contact with children's birth family members.

*www.i-space.org.uk