

## **Guidance concerning the assessment of a new partner of an existing single Foster Parent**

### **Introduction**

This guidance document considers the process, checks and assessments that are required when an existing single foster parent forms a new partnership/relationship.

Different checks and assessments are required at different stages of the relationship in order to safeguard children and young people in placement and consider any effects the new relationship may have upon the children and young people. New partners will also need guidance and support as they develop a relationship with the young people, including expectations around confidentiality and behaviour management.

This guidance will set out the responsibilities of ISP, the foster parent and the new partner at different stages of the relationship. These issues will be discussed with single foster parents at the time when they apply to become a foster parent and we will promote a culture of openness and honesty between foster parents and their supervising social worker with regard to personal relationships in order to safeguard children and young people, and promote their wellbeing.

Any changes in the household must be notified to ISP in line with the Foster Care Agreement.

### **The 4 different stages of the relationship: requirements and expectations**

#### **Stage 1: Initial stages of the relationship (no contact with foster child/home)**

1. The foster parent must inform their supervising social worker that they are beginning a relationship.
2. The supervising social worker and foster parent will discuss this guidance and confirm requirements should the relationship progress further.
3. The supervising social worker will recommend that the foster parent informs their new partner of the process.
4. ISP will inform the social workers of any young people in placement that the foster parent has started a relationship, and share this guidance with them.

Notes about this stage:

- a. Although the new partner is not having any contact with the young people, it must be considered at this stage any impact an awareness of the relationship may have on them and their secure base.
- b. Foster parents must be mindful of the information they share with a new partner at this early stage to ensure the safety of the young people. Adults who harm children may seek out single parents and foster children on online dating sites with a view to securing access to vulnerable children. We recommend that foster parents who use online dating sites do not openly share their status as a foster parent on their profiles, or within initial conversations.
- c. A new partner must not be introduced to children in placement within the first three months of the relationship.

**Stage 2: New partner is a visitor to foster home and has contact with foster child.**

1. The foster parent must supervise contact between their new partner and the children. They must at no times be alone with children and young people
2. ISP will request that a DBS check is undertaken on the new partner. This will be arranged by ISP.
3. The supervising social worker will meet with the new partner to:
  - Explain this process
  - Discuss expectations about confidentiality. They will ask the new partner to sign a confidentiality agreement.
  - Discuss expectations around the care of the child and their responsibilities.
4. In the event that ISP has concerns about the new partner, we reserve the right to conduct additional checks at this stage and will share any concerns openly with the foster parent and the local authority social worker/s. These checks might include a social media check and checks with previous partners. You will be informed before these happen. We may also carry out additional visits to the home, including unannounced visits.

### Notes about this stage

- a. All actions within this stage must be completed within 3 months of the new partner visiting the foster home.
- b. The new partner must not stay overnight at the foster home, or have any unsupervised access with the children and young people until all checks have been completed and agreement has been obtained from ISP and the local authorities for any children in placement.
- c. If we have concerns about the new partner, this may prevent further development of the relationship and may impact the foster parent's approval. Should these circumstances arise, we will discuss the issues with you immediately.

### **Stage 3: New partner visits and stays over at the foster home and the LAC is in placement.**

1. A local authority check on the new partner will be completed, if this has not already been requested at stage 2.
2. The supervising social worker will continue to observe and consider the impact of the new relationship on children in placement, to ensure their wellbeing.
3. The views of the young people in placement will be sought.
4. The supervising social worker will offer support to the new partner, including opportunities to discuss their experiences with the young people and any support needs. Expectations around the care of the child and their responsibilities will continue to be discussed.
5. If the relationship is moving quickly and positively, we may invite the new partner to attend a Skills to Foster course to support their role in the family.

### Notes about this stage

- a. It is assumed at this stage that the partner will have unsupervised contact with children and young people. However, at this stage, partners will not be responsible for the care of the children and young people. Non-resident partners who wish to share care of the children must be assessed and approved as foster parents first.

- b. We encourage families to take their time at this stage, and for new partners to carefully consider the role of a foster parent before progressing to stage 4, which will require them to be assessed and approved as a foster parent.
- c. If we have concerns about the new partner, this may prevent further development of the relationship and may impact the foster parent's approval. Should these circumstances arise, we will discuss the issues with you immediately.

#### **Stage 4: New partner moves into foster home.**

- 1. The young people's risk assessments and safer care plans will be updated to reflect the change to the household.
- 2. The new partner will be expected to attend the Skills to Foster course, if they have not already done so, and complete the mandatory training courses required of an applicant to foster. It is expected that these will be completed ASAP.
- 3. A form F assessment with a view to Panel approval as a foster parent must be started within 6-12 months of the new partner moving in.

#### Notes about this stage

- a. We encourage the family to take time to establish the new phase of their relationship before the Form F assessment begins. We would not ordinarily begin this assessment within the first 6 months. However, it must have begun within the first year.
- b. If at the end of the year the new partner is not willing to be assessed as a foster parent then the new partner must either move out of the home, or the foster parent will be required to stop fostering.
- c. If the assessment raises concerns about the new partner's suitability to foster, this will impact the continuation of the relationship and the foster parent's approval. We will discuss this with you should the situation arise.