

Placement Stability Policy

Aim

The aim of this policy is to maintain placement stability for children and ensure the welfare of foster families during difficulties and challenges that arise during placement.

Frequent moves can adversely affect children in a number of ways, including their ability to make secure attachments and friendships and to enjoy continuity of education and health care. We strongly believe that children placed with our foster families should not experience the trauma of a placement breakdown and this policy explains the ways in which we will provide additional support to families where a risk of placement breakdown has been identified.

Outcomes

1. Children and young people will enjoy long-term fostering placements that promote secure and healthy attachments.
2. Foster families and fostered children will experience support during difficult times, including after a placement disruption if stability can't be achieved.

Placement Stability Monitoring

Early identification of issues allows everyone to look at ways of preventing an escalation of the challenges facing a placement. Placement stability is monitored, and support needs identified, through supervision, telephone calls and daily logs. Every child's placement is given a placement stability RAG rating on the main page of the child's case record on CHARMS. This highlights how stable the placement is and whether additional intervention is required. It is important that this RAG rating is reviewed and updated straight away if placement stability changes.

Placement stability is monitored by the supervising social worker and registered manager. Children whose placements have been flagged 'amber' or 'red' are discussed at the team meeting, in staff supervision, and at the agency MAP meeting.

Placement Stability Meetings

As soon as a placement moves into an amber or red rating, this is an indicator that a discussion is required with all concerned: the child, the foster parent, supervising social worker and the placing authority to address the reasons for this. An updated risk assessment should also be

considered. The supervising social worker and registered manager will agree short-term interventions to support the placement.

The ISP supervising social worker will contact the local authority with the placement stability concerns and request a stability meeting (sometimes referred to as a 'disruption meeting'). The meeting is chaired by the local authority, and the child may attend. The meeting will consider what is going well in placement, as well as the issues that are causing concern. The focus of the meeting will be to find ways to resolve these issues and stabilise the placement.

Notes from this meeting will be uploaded to the child's CHARMS record using the progress item 'stability/disruption meeting'. The supervising social worker will ensure that the challenges and preventative actions are discussed in foster parent supervision.

The action points of the meeting (the placement stability plan) should be captured in the Placement Stability Notes on the main page of the child's case record on CHARMS.

The placement stability plan will consider ways to support the young person and foster family and stabilise the placement. This can include (but is not limited to):

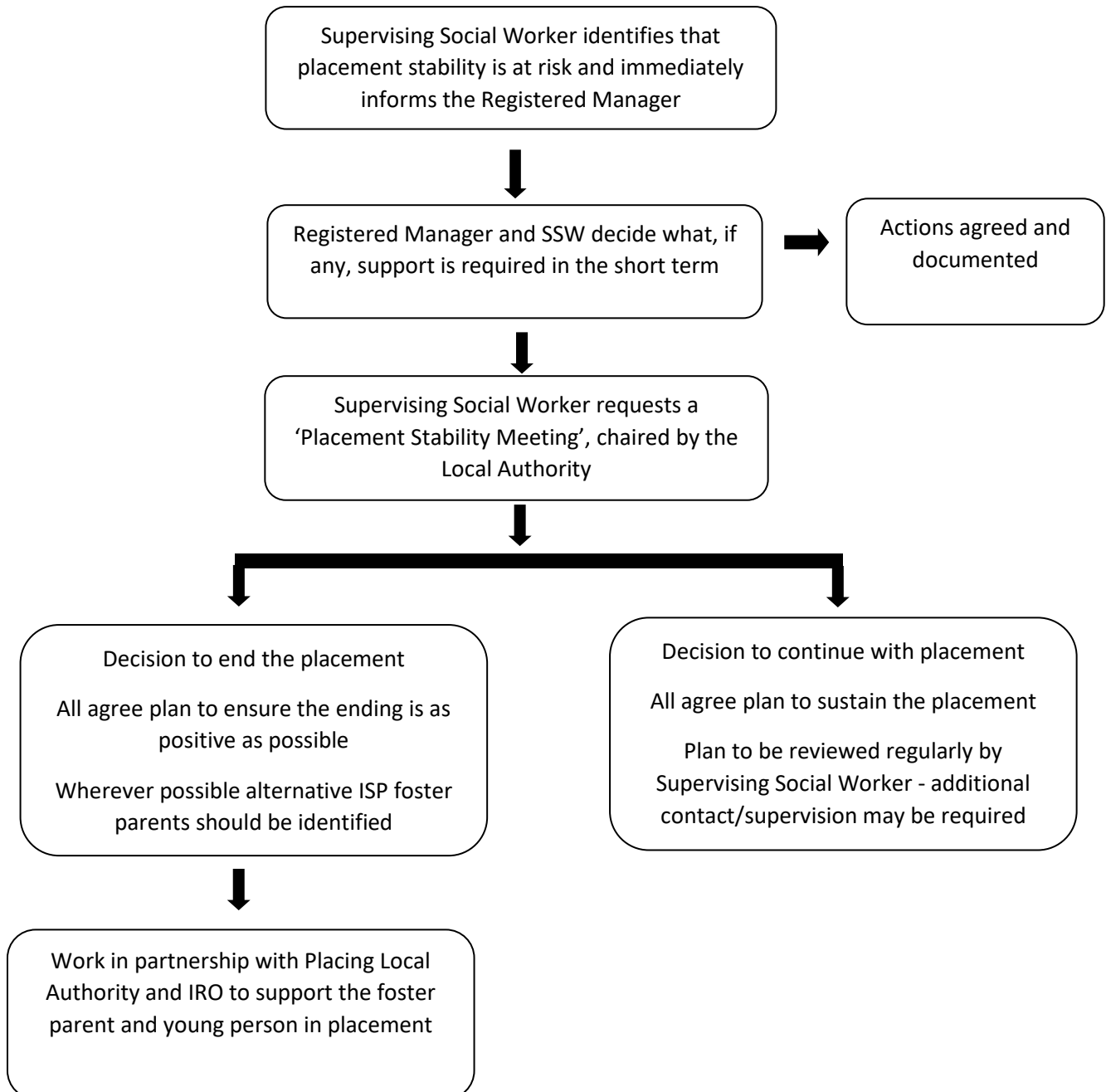
- The foster parent's training needs
- The frequency of supervision and support visits
- Therapeutic support for the young person and/or foster parent
- Support from the advisory teacher
- Buddying or peer mentoring support
- The use of respite care and sessional worker support

If, at the end of the meeting, it is decided that it is not possible to continue the placement, those present should identify and record the reasons why the placement cannot be sustained and agree a plan to manage the ending as effectively as possible. The local authority will notify the IRO immediately. ISP will encourage the local authority to review the young person's care plan to reflect the planned ending of the placement.

If it is agreed that a placement should end, the emphasis will be on offering an alternative placement within ISP.

If it is felt necessary to give notice to the local authority to end the placement, this will be done by an agency manager or principal social worker, who will wish to satisfy themselves that all attempts to sustain the placement have been made.

Placement Stability Meeting and Positive Management of Placement Endings



Immediate or unplanned endings

ISP understands the impact that unplanned endings have on children and how repeated placement moves have a negative impact on the outcomes for Looked After Children. Therefore, we do not move children immediately or without planning except in an emergency situation to prevent an immediate risk of serious harm and/or to protect others from serious injury.

If a foster parent requests that a child is moved from their placement immediately then the supervising social worker will discuss this with them to ascertain if the reasons are serious enough to warrant this in order to prevent an immediate risk of serious harm or to protect others from serious injury. They will discuss support options that can be offered to try and manage the crisis and stabilise the placement. The supervising social worker will share the concerns with the registered manager and a decision will be made regarding an unplanned move for the child.

Out of Hours requests for immediate removal of a child from their placement

If a foster parent requests that the child is moved from their placement immediately outside of usual working hours (after 5pm and before 9am, on weekends or bank holidays) the on-call social worker will make contact with the foster parent to establish what support can be provided or action taken to sustain the placement. If no short-term resolution can be found to enable the child to remain in placement then the on-call social worker will contact the registered manager, or equivalent, to agree what action will be taken. Wherever possible, any placement move will be avoided but in extreme circumstances the child will be moved as an emergency placement, within ISP if possible. The on-call social worker will liaise with the placing authority to make a suitable emergency placement.

End of Placement Meetings

When an immediate or unplanned ending of a placement occurs, an end-of-placement meeting will be held. This will usually be chaired by either the supervising social worker or the registered manager, but on occasion it might be appropriate for someone independent of the prior management of the placement to chair the meeting.

The meeting should include any person who might have a useful contribution to make. The foster parent will be expected to attend, and the views of the young person should be sought, where possible. The views of the placing local authority should also be sought, if they are not in attendance.

The purpose of the meeting is to examine the progress of the placement in order to understand the sequence of events that led to the placement breakdown and learn lessons from what occurred. This will:

- Improve practice by understanding what went wrong.
- Recognise positive work and good experiences for the child amongst the difficulties.
- Support everyone and help them carry on and recover.
- Demonstrate that disruption is never the fault of one or two people, or the result of a single factor. It is invariably the outcome of a series of connected factors.
- Identify factors that may need to be taken into account prior to any future placements with the foster parent.
- Consider matching considerations for onward placement of the child.
- Enable ISP to address any agency learning needs and any amendments needed to policy and practice.

The end of placement meeting must take account of the impact of the event on the foster parent and other household members. Foster parents have told us that when a placement ends suddenly it can lead them with feelings of loss and failure and that this is also felt by the rest of the fostering household. The meeting must consider the family's support needs and reassure them that the feelings associated with placement breakdown are acknowledged and respected by the social work team.

The minutes of the end of placement meeting should be uploaded to both the child's and foster parent's CHARMS record using the progress item 'end of placement meeting'.

Following a placement breakdown, unless the foster parent requests some 'time out', or there are serious practice issues that need to be explored, the foster parent should not be put 'on hold' and should be considered for new placement matching. A review of approval should be considered as a course of action when the suitability of the foster parent and household needs to be explored.

ISP can use the findings from end of placement meetings to learn from experience, to improve our practice, to ensure that we are providing the best possible service for children and foster parents and as a means of assuring quality of future service provision.