

Supporting and Supervising Foster Parents

Aim

The aim of this policy is to inform foster parents of the support package available to them at ISP, both in terms of practice supervision and our wider support services. This policy is compliant with the requirements of fostering services under the [Fostering Services Regulations \(England\) 2011](#) and the [National Minimum Standards \(England\) 2011](#)

Outcome

Our foster parents will have access to social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care for children.

Underpinning principles

- The needs of the children are paramount.
- We view our foster parents as fellow professional colleagues.
- We will be clear about our expectations of foster parents, and what our foster parents can expect from the agency.
- We expect our foster parents to be open, direct and honest in communication with our staff, local authority social workers and young people.
- Our staff will be open, direct and honest in their relationship with foster parents.
- At all times foster parents are expected to conduct themselves in a way that does not bring the agency into disrepute.
- Foster parents are expected to seek advice and support if they have a problem.
- Foster parents are expected to complete training identified within their PDP (Personal Development Plan) and where appropriate undertake specific training to meet the identified needs of the children placed in their care.
- Foster parents are not expected to work beyond their capacity.

How we support our foster parents

1. Regional ISP centres

ISP maintains a number of regional centres to ensure that our foster parents have local access to support, including social workers, fostering advisors, advisory teachers, therapists, discussion groups and training. Our local centres enable our foster parents to meet with each other in a structured environment that promotes support and continuous development.

Our regional centres support the whole fostering family, including birth children and children who are fostered. All members of the household will be visited and have an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings with agency staff. Social and educational activities and trips are regularly arranged for young people.

2. Supervising Social Worker

Each approved foster parent is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. Foster parent supervision is a professional relationship with planned supervision taking place every 4-6 weeks. Respite foster parents will receive supervision every 4-12 weeks, considering and agreeing on individual circumstances. It is also expected that informal supervision will happen when needed.

There will be occasions where staff or foster parents are unavailable or frequency of supervision diminishes from the organisation's expectations of four to six weeks due to absence from work or other unforeseen circumstances. This should be brought to the attention of the registered manager.

Any agreed changes to the frequency of supervision for individuals should be consulted between the supervisor and supervisee when negotiating the terms of the Supervision Agreement. A decrease in frequency of supervision for foster parents may be considered when:

- a) No child or young person in placement.
- b) Foster parents provide 'respite' only with significant time between placements.
- c) Foster parents are 'on hold'
- d) The agency is conducting an investigation, reassessment or form F update and no child or young person is in placement.

However, even in the above circumstances supervision for foster parents must never fall below a 3 month frequency. Any decision making regarding changes to frequency must have management agreement and the rationale should be clearly evidenced on CHARMS.

In fostering households the primary foster parent should be available for each supervision session. Supervision should be undertaken face-to-face. Any requirement to use telephone

or a virtual medium (e.g. in the event of adverse weather conditions or health issues) must be agreed with the registered manager.

It is important that co-foster parents receive supervision and have an opportunity to talk with their supervising social worker. It is expected that they will be available for a minimum of 3 supervision sessions within a 12 month period (at least one of which must be face-to-face, and one of which must be alone). In the event that exceptional circumstances make this unattainable, you should seek agreement with the registered manager that contact and support with co-foster parents can be delivered and achieved in other ways.

The main aims of supervision include:

- To support foster parents in the work they are doing and to provide an opportunity for them to discuss concerns or challenges presented in caring for the child and to note their progress and development.
- To ensure that foster parents understand what is expected of them and are appropriately implementing the agency's policies and procedures, including (but not limited to):
 - Maintaining health and safety in the home.
 - Safeguarding children in line with the child's risk assessment and the family safer caring plan.
 - Making decisions in line with delegated authority arrangements.
 - Providing appropriate pocket money and allowances for children and young people.
 - Using the child's Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appropriately.
- To ensure that all are working in line with the care plan and placement plan in meeting the child's assessed needs.
- To ensure that the needs of the foster parent and their family are fully discussed alongside the needs of children in placement. Take appropriate action to meet the family's needs.
- To discuss the learning and development needs of foster parents and ways in which development opportunities can be accessed.

The supervising social worker will maintain a record of all contact and supervision sessions. They will provide foster parents with a written record of their supervision meetings and ensure that foster parents are happy with the accuracy of these records. Supervision records will reflect both the progress of children and the development of skills and knowledge of the foster parent.

Supervision records are held on the foster parent's 'Charms' record. The record will include dates when supervision was planned but did not take place. Foster parents will electronically sign their supervision records to confirm that they are an accurate record of matters discussed.

In addition to these formal supervision visits, the supervising social worker will:

- Ensure that new foster parents receive an effective induction, understand the Foster Care Agreement and have access to the Foster Parent Handbook and our other online resources.
- Ensure that the foster parent's profile is kept up to date with any changes, as children will be matched to foster families based on current and significant information.
- Conduct at least one unannounced visit to the fostering household each year.
- Review foster parents' daily logs and provide advice and guidance about effective record keeping.
- Keep foster parents informed of support groups and agency developments.
- Be the main link between the foster family and the local authority and its social workers.
- Meet with all members of the fostering household and give children an opportunity to talk to them alone.
- Ensure good communication with the local authority social worker and contribute to care plan reviews.
- Provide feedback for the foster parents' annual home review.

3. Fostering Advisor

In addition to the supervising social worker, all our fostering families are supported by a fostering advisor whose role is to give advice and support from a practical standpoint. These advisors may be an experienced foster parent, or experienced in child care, and not only do they help the foster parents to understand the expectations of being a foster parent, but they also help the professional ISP team to understand how caring for foster children impacts the fostering family. Their role is a vital part of our all-encompassing therapeutic approach to fostering.

The fostering advisor works closely with the supervising social worker, and their roles are complementary in providing support for the fostering family. The fostering advisor is available to the foster parent by phone, email and face-to-face to give support, help and guidance. The role is flexible and responds to the changing needs of each fostering family. It might include (but not be limited to):

- Telephoning foster parents weekly to check that everyone in the household is OK.
- Visiting foster parents at a time of crisis to give verbal support and a listening ear, or by spending time with the foster child.
- Taking children out for one-to-one support.
- Being involved with children's activities and trips.
- Attending network meetings or children's care plan review meetings.
- Helping with placement matching, having discussions with parents about potential placements.

- Supporting foster parents at times of complaints and/or allegations.
- Arranging respite for families.
- Completing forms for foster parent pay, holiday allowances etc.
- Carrying out a second annual unannounced visit.
- Arranging foster parent discussion groups, support groups or workshops.
- Supporting foster parents who are completing their TSDS workbook.
- Being aware of foster parents' training needs and having discussions with foster parents about required training.

4. Online resources

Our foster families have access to our I-SPACE website, which contains information and advice on a range of issues relevant to fostering, including health, life skills, leaving care and online safety.

Our Children's Guides are also available electronically at I-SPACE, and the website is home to our Foster Parent Handbook and provides a link to agency policies. See www.i-space.org.uk.

Anti-discriminatory practice

Supervision should promote anti-discriminatory practice and reflect equal opportunities. Supervising social workers should consider issues that might be relevant for particular foster parents, e.g. in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexuality or disability. Issues of discriminatory or oppressive practice should be fully and sensitively explored and action taken where necessary. A foster parent should feel free to be able to raise any issues or concerns at any time. The power relationship between the supervising social worker and the foster parent needs to recognise that each are equal partners in the process and need to work together to ensure that standards of care are met.

Confidentiality

No information relevant to the work of a foster parent can be kept entirely confidential. Confidentiality issues are discussed when the supervision agreement is drawn up and the foster parent will be informed about who will have access to the record of supervision.