



Assessment of Dogs/Pets Policy & Guidance

All Fostering Services

This procedure forms part of the Quality Management system ISO 9001.

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	Health and Safety Risk Assessment

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1. Introduction

This guidance provides advice about the assessment of prospective foster parents who are dog/pet owners and of approved foster parents who become dog/pet owners. Specific guidance is given on prohibited dogs and other potentially dangerous dogs. But regardless of the breed, all dogs have the potential to harm.

Part of the assessment to become a foster parent includes assessment of risk in relation to pets including dogs. These assessments are updated as new pets are introduced to the home, or an annual basis. The risk assessment considers the safeguarding of children as well as the potential benefits of pet ownership. Provided appropriate consideration is given to a child's safety, ownership of dogs and pets can bring many benefits to children within a fostering household.

The matching of children alongside pets must be considered within the placement process, including emergency placements and short break. This includes consideration of the dog's size and temperament, the family's management of pets, the child's history, possible fear of dogs or other animals, any past ill-treatment of animals, and the child's particular needs.

2. Positive Aspects of Dog/Pet Ownership

Whilst carrying out a risk assessment of a prospective foster parent's dog/pet, the potential benefits of a dog/pet matched appropriately with children should also be taken into account, which include:

- A source of companionship and unconditional affection;
- An element in a secure family base and family membership;

- Exploring taking responsibility and caring;
- Provision of leisure opportunities and physical well-being;
- Emotional repair work for some children who have experienced rejection, neglect, or abuse.

3. Prohibited Dangerous Dogs

The following dogs are prohibited by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991:

- Pit Bull Terrier;
- Japanese Towser or Tosa;
- Dogo Argentine;
- Fila Barazilliero.
- XL Bully *see note below

Pit Bull type dogs can be called:

- American Staffordshire Terriers (Am Staffs);
- Irish Staffordshire Bull Terrier (ISBT);
- Irish Blue or Red Nose;

Also, some kinds of American Bulldogs have been found to be Pit Bulls.

***Note about the XL Bully**

Following a concerning rise in attacks and fatalities caused by XL Bully dogs, in February 2024 the government added this breed to the list of dogs banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

This link gives guidance on the official definition of an XL Bully dog:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-definition-of-an-xl-bully-dog/official-definition-of-an-xl-bully-dog>

Owners of XL Bully dogs are able to apply for a Certificate of Exemption to keep their dogs, give evidence that their dog is not a danger to the public and comply with the following rules:

Dogs must be:

- neutered
- microchipped
- kept on a lead and muzzled at all times when in public

- kept in a secure place so they cannot escape

And owners must:

- have third party liability insurance against your dog injuring other people
- be aged over 16
- show the Certificate of Exemption when asked by a police officer or council dog warden, either at the time or within 5 days
- let the Index of Exempt Dogs know if you change address, or your dog dies

For further information please see the following links to the Dogs Trust and RSPCA:
<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/dog-advice/life-with-your-dog/at-home/american-bully-xl>
<https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/endcruelty/changingthelaw/bsl/xlbullies>

Information on the XL bully ban - Scottish SPCA <https://www.scottishspca.org/xl-bully-updates>

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/new-safeguarding-measures-xl-bully-breed-type-dogs>.

If an applicant owns any of the above dangerous dogs, they cannot be assessed to become a foster parent (unless they relinquish ownership of the dog).

If an approved foster parent acquires one of the above dogs, their approval would need to be terminated if they were not prepared to cease ownership. Taking ownership of a banned breed of dog is illegal (England, Scotland, and Wales).

If a fostering household already includes an XL Bully dog, and a Certificate of Exemption is obtained, the following safeguarding action is required:

- 1. Ensure children are never left alone with these dogs at any time.**
2. To consider whether the dog needs to be kept on a lead and muzzled at all times when children are present.
3. A specialist dog risk assessment must be commissioned.
The Coram BAAF 'Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption – Good Practice Guide' suggest the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) as the leading pet behaviour experts in the field. See <https://www.apbc.org.uk/adoption-foster-assessments/>.
4. The risk assessment regarding the dog must be updated and signed off by the Registered Manager.
5. The Individual Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Safer Care Plan for each child must be updated in relation to keeping children and young people safe around the dog, including expected compliance around any measures to be taken as set out in the

Dogs Trust guidance above. The risk assessments must be signed off by the Registered Manager.

6. The local authorities for all children must be informed, and provided with a copy of the risk assessments. **Local authorities must provide written agreement for an existing placement to continue or a new placement to commence when the household includes an XL Bully dog with a Certificate of Exemption.**

4. Other Potentially Dangerous Dogs or Pets

Special caution should also be observed when assessing households containing the following dogs:

- Alsatian (German Shepherd);
- Rottweiler;
- Doberman;
- Bulldog;
- Neapolitan Mastiff;
- Japanese Akita;
- Or a 'pack' of dogs (3 or more dogs)

In the event that the agency's risk assessment highlights concerns, a specialist dog behavioural risk assessment and/or additional dog training must be considered and if not provided the reasons must be clearly stated by a manager.

With regard to the number of dogs within a home, it is generally regarded that two would be an acceptable maximum. This is because BAAF guidance (Practice Note 42) makes reference to dogs being fundamentally pack animals, with an escalated risk of pack instinct developing where there are more than two dogs. Where there are 3 or more dogs in the home, the agency's 3+ Dog Risk Assessment must be completed and this may identify the need for a specialist dog behavioural risk assessment.

The agency will also not approve foster parents who keep any pets listed in the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

In the event that there is uncertainty regarding the breed of a pet, or question around the potential crossbreed with an animal listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 or Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, the agency will seek appropriate support and guidance from a vet and/or RSPCA.

5. Key Risk Assessment Issues

Fostering Network considers this issue should be approached from a health and safety perspective and a risk assessment conducted. The agency's Health and Safety Risk Assessment includes questions about household pets and dogs. The risk assessment should be updated on at least a yearly basis and in the event of any changes to dog/pet ownership within the fostering household.

Key points to consider are:

- Are the family responsible pet owners? Legal requirements, e.g. microchipping should be checked.
- How and where are the dogs or animals to be kept?
- Will they be accessible to the foster child in any way?
- What will be the risks to the health and safety of the foster child/young person?
- The prospective foster parent should be asked how they would feel and react if their dog/animals were 'hurt' by a foster child/young person;
- Additional caution should be exercised where young children may be placed e.g. for Parent and Child placements and children under 5.

In a situation where the foster family is visiting a family member / friend who owns an XL Bully or other dangerous dog, arrangements must be in place for the dog to be tied up / muzzled/ in a separate room / securely fenced off area, The foster child / any child must NEVER be left unsupervised with the dog at any time.

Introducing new pets to the home

Before introducing a new dog to the household, foster parents must discuss this with their supervising social worker in order to consider the impact for children, any potential risks, and to update the family's risk assessments.

Health and hygiene

Pet risk assessments will consider health and hygiene factors, including routine veterinary care and management of faeces. Children should not be tasked with emptying pet litter trays or clearing up faeces, and gardens should be checked for faeces in the summer before children go out to play. Play sandpits should be covered when not in use to ensure that they are not used by cats as a litter tray.

Where households include babies, pets must not be left alone with the baby, and must not have access to the baby's sleeping area. We do not recommend allowing pets into any young child's bedroom.

Some children may be allergic to pets and this may result in respiratory illness or other medical conditions. Pets should not be introduced to homes where allergies are known. If an allergy to a pet is identified at a later date, advice should be sought from medical practitioners regarding appropriate control of symptoms. Where symptoms are severe, it may be necessary to re-home a pet in order for the child to safely remain in the foster home.

6. Assessment of Dogs

The safety of children is paramount. When applying to foster, it is the responsibility of the prospective foster parent to demonstrate the dog's ability to cope with children and that they have a responsible attitude and good understanding of the issues involved. Responsible dog owners should not mind a check being made on the dog, as well as a check on their suitability to be foster parents.

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

The size of a dog is important, especially where vulnerable children are involved. However, small dogs can be snappy and the suitability depends on a particular dog's temperament.

It should be borne in mind that all dogs have the potential to be dangerous and that children can provoke attacks from dogs or may themselves cause harm to dogs or other pets in the household. Foster parents must be able to supervise both the child and dog at all times, to prevent dangerous situations arising.

Social workers need to be aware of their own attitudes towards dog and pet ownership and how this might affect their approach when completing the risk assessment, combined with ongoing consideration of dogs and pets during the assessment of the prospective foster parent.

Social workers should remain aware of everyday interaction between owners and pets and how the pet fits into the family dynamics and routines, considering both benefits and risks as to how this might impact a child placed in a fostering household.

Keeping dogs for breeding

The Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 required anyone breeding five or more litters a year to register as a breeder with the local authority which then has a duty to inspect and provide a licence. The assessing social worker/supervising social worker must be satisfied that the foster parent is a responsible breeder (whether or not this activity requires registration) and that this activity does not interfere with their ability to carry out the fostering task. Areas of the household used for breeding must be secured to prevent access by children.

Working dogs

Working dogs may include police dogs, farm dogs or sheep dogs. Where households include working animals, the assessment must include consideration of the animal's accommodation, which must be outside of the home and secured to ensure that children cannot get access.

7. Assessment of Other Pets

Other pets will be considered on an individual basis within the risk assessment. These pets may include cats, rabbits, lizards, snakes, rodents, and fish.

In the majority of situations, a well-informed assessor will have the relevant skills and knowledge to satisfactorily complete the risk assessment. In the event that the assessor does not feel confident to do so, a second opinion should be sought and if required, a specialist assessment or veterinary references should be obtained.

If the foster family have livestock or horses on their premises, an additional 'smallholdings and farms' risk assessment will be completed.

Horse riding

If the foster family own a horse, and wish for young people in placement to be able to ride the horse, the following action will be required:

1. An activity risk assessment must be completed;
2. The local authority responsible for the young person must be asked for their written consent to the activity;
3. Suitable safety horse riding equipment must be used and worn e.g. riding boots and riding hat;
4. The foster parent must obtain horse insurance to cover accidents to riders, and ensure that the insurance will cover foster children.

8. Action in the Event of Injury to a Child by a Pet

In the event that a dog or any other animal in the household bites, scratches or otherwise injures a child or adult of the household, the foster parent must ensure the following:

- Remove the animal from the household if it is safe to do so;
- Administer first aid and seek medical attention as soon as it is possible to do so;
- Notify the supervising social worker or Out of Hours team as soon as possible.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the agency may complete monitoring/notifiable event recording and procedures.

Further Advice

Further advice is available at the [GOV.UK website](#) which has information on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and those breeds classified by this Act with pictures of the dangerous dogs. You may also wish to look at [CoramBAAF website](#) and read Practice Note 42 Placing Children with Dog-Ownning Families and refer to the CoramBAAF publication 'Dogs and pets in fostering and adoption' by Paul Adams.

RELATED LEGISLATION

[Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, amended 1997](#)

[Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#)