



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

At the heart of everything we do

# Foster Carer Handbook

Fostering in Bedford Borough



**BEDFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# Purpose of the Foster Carer Handbook

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The Foster Carer Handbook is intended to be a reference guide for both new and existing foster carers. The handbook provides up to date information and guidance to all our foster carers on fostering matters. In addition, it will also provide additional sources of information for practical help in identifying standards of care that are expected from foster carers and in return what you can expect from the Bedford Fostering Team. New policies and guidance are updated in line with good practice, national regulations and national standards. The relevant policies are contained in Bedford Borough Council's [Policies and Procedures Manual](#) that is available online.

The Fostering Handbook has links to the Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and references to the relevant Training, Support and Development Standards. You should also use the handbook to support your learning and development throughout your journey as a foster carer.

Foster carers play an important role in the lives of Children Looked After and their families so it is important that you have the necessary tools to support you with this task. The handbook is one of these tools alongside the many professionals you will work with including your Supervising Social Worker and other foster carers.

We welcome any feedback to the Fostering Handbook and this can be given to the Supervising Social Worker or the Fostering Team Manager. This is the start of a great journey for you and the children and young people you may work with. <https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/contents.html>

## Bedford Borough Council Vision for Fostering

- To recognise that all children are unique individuals and to offer personalised support/care that is delivered locally wherever possible.
- To provide information about the services the Bedfordshire Fostering Team deliver and promote informed choices wherever possible.
- To develop and evolve services in response to identified needs.
- To promote a positive culture in which people feel valued and respected, and are able to challenge, share new ideas and to think innovatively.
- To be confident, behave with integrity, be accountable, encourage candour and promote a sustained learning culture that ensures past poor outcomes are not repeated.
- To have a professional and highly skilled workforce that is effectively trained and supported. This will ensure that staff and foster carers are clear about their role and are working to clear objectives.
- To help children to reach their potential by matching them with the most suitable fostering families. This will be supported by an evidence-based approach to assessments that objectively demonstrates that we are making a difference by measuring the impact of our fostering work.
- To work effectively in partnership with foster carers, children, their families and other professionals. To pay close attention to all views and use them to inform and influence service development.
- To ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently to achieve best value for the funding allocation received to continuously improve service delivery in collaboration with our foster carers.

**FANTASTIC  
FOSTER CARERS  
- MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**

## Statement of Purpose

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The purpose of Bedford Borough Council's Fostering Service is to provide quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. The service objectives are to provide a skilled and flexible fostering service which can meet the wide range of assessed needs of children and young people which include:

- short and long-term care arrangements;
- Specialist Parent and Child Foster Carers;
- Family link specifically for children with disabilities;
- A scheme for teenagers where the foster carers give a commitment that the care arrangement will extend to 18+ Staying Put;
- a solo scheme which provides a high level of support to young people moving from residential into foster care and for children with disabilities;
- a short term emergency placement scheme (Respite) which offers emergency care arrangements for up to 28 days;
- Out of hours emergency duty carers.

## Foster Carer Charter

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The Foster Carer Charter represents the aspirations of Bedford Borough Council and the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, and its commitment to strive for the best practice at all times to ensure children and young people in the care of the Council, receive the best possible standards of care, from foster carers who are viewed as an essential part of the professional team supporting the child. It also recognises the emotional commitment that foster carers offer children at Bedford Borough Council. This charter explains what we can expect from each other and applies equally to all foster carers whether related or unrelated to the children they care for on behalf of Bedford Borough Bedford Borough children. This Charter is endorsed by the elected members of Bedford Borough in their role as Corporate Parents.

### Bedford Borough Fostering Services Role

The Fostering Services role is to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and provide supervision and support.

### The Foster Carers' Role

Foster carers are at the heart of the Foster Care Service. They are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment. This provides children and young people with stability, quality care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their full potential.

### Children's Services Role

Bedford Borough Children's Services recognise the positive and central role that foster carers play in the lives of the children placed with them. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, all members of Bedford Borough's Children's Services are committed to working in partnership with foster carers to ensure that the child placed with them can live as normal a family life as possible. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

# What foster carers can expect from Bedford fostering service:

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## Working In Partnership

### We will:

- Work in partnership with foster carers, recognising that foster carers have the skills and expertise to make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.
- Value your skills and expertise and recognise that you know the children best.
- Include you in all meetings which affect the child you care for.
- Ensure that this service meets fostering regulations and standards and Bedford Borough Councils Statement of Purpose.
- Treat you fairly without discrimination and respect your confidentiality.
- Welcome the Representatives of Bedfordshire Foster Care Association to Corporate Parents panel, where major policies are agreed.

## Providing Information

### We will:

- Undertake to give you all information available in writing prior to placements being made and will ensure that a Placement Plan is completed with you and is agreed in advance of the placement wherever possible.
- Ensure that all information is regularly updated so that you are best placed to care for the child placed with you. This will include information from the team around the child.
- Value the information that foster carers contribute.
- Provide you with the financial policy for foster carers and all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements. This will be disseminated annually.
- Provide you with full details of all relevant departmental structures, staffing, policies and procedures including any changes.

## Clarity About Decisions

### We will:

- Recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be enabled to make every day decisions using delegated authority. This will allow children placed with you to feel part of your family and to not feel different from their friends, whilst having regard for the wishes of parents and the courts.
- Clarify which decisions you can make from the start of the placement, at the child's Placement Planning meeting and at the child's looked after reviews.
- Ensure that everyone in Bedford Borough Children's Services understands the implications of delegated authority and will give timely and detailed information about decision making which allows you to act as an advocate in all aspects of the child's development.
- Also ensure that policy and practice does not place artificial barriers in the way of promoting a normal family, school and social life for the children placed with you.

## Support

### **We will:**

- Recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task which can affect all aspects of family and social life. Appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the whole fostering family and to the child in your care.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support and consider your needs in a timely and empathetic fashion.
- Provide you with regular supervision and frequent telephone contact which meets your needs and those of the children you foster.
- Commit to formally review your practice on at least an annual basis which will give you the opportunity to comment on your fostering experience.
- Provide you with systems that allow you to share electronic information and documents securely ensuring that data and confidentiality are protected.
- Give you honest and open feedback which allows you to reflect on your practice and develop your skills further.
- Provide you with access to out of hours telephone support from people with fostering expertise.
- Provide specialist support to inform the care that you provide in areas such as education, health, youth offending and / or behaviour.
- Pay your fostering allowances, foster carer expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Provide a range of support groups for foster carers to attend including a mainstream foster carers support group, a connected carers support group and teenage carers group, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Provide you with access to trained foster carers who act as mentors and who can support you with issues relating to fostering.
- Provide you with annual membership to The Fostering Network.
- Support the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association in its role supporting foster carers and providing them with information and access to social activities.

## Learning And Development

### **We will:**

- Believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure that you have the skills and knowledge you need, and will enable you to develop your practice in order that you can help transform the lives of the children you foster.
- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by course trainers who understand the fostering task. We will encourage trainers to allow you opportunities for self-reflection so that you are able to apply learning to your practice.
- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support to other foster carers.
- Ensure all foster carers have an annual, mutually agreed training and development plan reflecting their knowledge, the needs of the child in placement and their fostering aspirations.
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child.
- Recognise and value the knowledge and experience that foster carers bring as part of the team around the child.

## Fair Treatment

### **We will:**

- Consult with foster carers before changing terms, conditions and policies affecting fostering.
- Provide an independent advice and mediation service which you can access without recourse to the fostering service.
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, are kept informed and provided with independent advice if you are subject to an allegation.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales.
- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.
- We will allow you timely access to records held relating to you and your family.

## Communication And Consultation

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

### **We will:**

- Facilitate regular communication between you, The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association, Councillors, and the management network.
- Provide you with the opportunity to influence relevant policies and procedures and ensure that we consult with you and the Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association on matters that affect you in good time and take into account your advice and concerns. As foster carers, we will give you timely feedback from consultations and provide clear information on how you as foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.



# What Bedford fostering service and children's service can expect from foster carers:

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## Working In Partnership

### **We expect foster carers to:**

- Demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.
- Maintain open and honest dialogue with the Fostering Service and Children's Services.
- Aim to build meaningful and collaborative relationships with the supervising social worker, the child's social worker and others within the team around child.
- Demonstrate their expertise and make use of their skills to the best of their ability.
- Provide children with a good experience of family life, attend meetings about the children and young people we care for and work closely with education and health providers.
- Be willing to work with birth parents and people who are important to a child.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet the standards set out in the fostering regulations and follow Bedford Borough's policies and procedures.
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.
- Inform their supervising social worker about factors that impact on their fostering including changes in their household and about any difficulties that arise for them.

## Respect For The Child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and supported to achieve their aspirations and reach their full potential.

We recognise that the experiences of each child and young person will have had a significant influence on their perception of what family life is and therefore their behaviours.

### **We expect foster carers to:**

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child, understand their needs, support their growth, and become an advocate and champion for them.
- Listen to the child placed with them and take their opinions into account including advocating for the child if needed.
- Provide children with an experience of a secure, positive family life that meets their needs.
- Respect and promote every aspect of a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage and offer the same level of care and protection as we would want for our own children.
- Give the children we care for, the best opportunities and support them to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Attend meetings with the professional network around the child including health and education and other relevant agencies and will provide reports about the children and young people we care for.
- Work with the agencies involved with the child to promote their overall needs.
- Work in an open and transparent way.

## Information

### **We expect foster carers to:**

- Inform their supervising social worker about any changes in their household as any changes may impact fostering.
- Inform their supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for them.
- Take part in regular supervision and an annual review of their fostering practice.
- Communicate regularly with the child's social worker to keep them fully informed of any developments in the child's life.
- Attend meetings and provide reports as requested in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child.
- Commit to keeping and sharing records with the Local Authority.
- Continue to undertake life story work, recognising the role you play in the child's personal identity and life journey not only now but for the future.

## Learning, Development And Support

### **We expect foster carers to:**

- Access 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 we can help transform the lives of the children they foster.
- Reflect on their fostering practice in order to improve the quality of care provided for the children and young people who live with them.
- Contribute to the ongoing development of the fostering service.
- Actively contribute to the development of a training and development plan which reflects their knowledge, the needs of the child in our care and their fostering aspirations.
- Continually develop their skills and understanding by attending relevant training and engaging in creative learning.
- Take up relevant training and development opportunities offered to them and inform the fostering service if they are unable to attend meetings or training as soon as reasonably possible.
- Attend and contribute to support groups and contribute to the training and mentoring of other foster carers where appropriate.

## Communication And Consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good working relationship.

### **We expect foster carers to:**

- Respond to local consultations and discussions in order to inform the development of the service.
- Meet with Councillors, managers and other professionals to promote dialogue and positive working relationships.
- Ensure that we communicate with the team around the child in a professional, sensitive and appropriate manner in line with the Department of Education, Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Department of Education Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Guidance.
- Communicate all concerns and significant events that impact the child looked after to the fostering service and child's social worker in a timely manner.



## Children's Pledge

We have made a pledge at Bedford Borough Council, to our children and young people so that they can know what they can expect from us, in terms of keeping them safe, happy and healthy. We have made three individualised pledges according to ages, and needs of children.

### A Pledge for Under 10 year olds

#### **We will help and support you to be as healthy as possible, by:**

- Making sure you visit the doctor and dentist.
- Helping you exercise and eat healthy food.
- Helping you if you are poorly.

#### **We will support you to do the best you can and enjoy life, by:**

- Helping you to go to school, see your friends and do hobbies and activities.
- Helping you to attend and do your very best at school.
- Helping you learn new skills and try new things.
- Celebrating when you do well.

#### **We will support you to get your voice heard, by:**

- Asking how you feel about things.
- Listening to you when we make plans.
- Having a Children in Care Council to help you have your say about the things that are important to you.
- Making sure there is someone for you to talk to about any problems or worries you have.
- Helping you to take part in your review

#### **We will help you to be as safe as possible, by:**

- Making sure your social worker visits you.
- Making sure you are happy where you live.
- Helping you stay out of trouble and danger.
- Making sure you are treated fairly.

#### **We will help you understand why you are in care, by:**

- Helping you with any questions you might have.
- Talking to you about the best ways to stay in touch with your family.
- Helping you learn about your family history and life story.

## A Pledge for our 10 -15 years

### **We will help you to be as safe as possible, by:**

- Making sure you know your social worker well.
- Making sure you see your social worker on your own on a regular basis.
- Making sure you keep your social worker for as long as possible.
- Making sure you know how to contact your social worker if you need to.
- Working hard to make sure you feel safe and happy where you live, and that you are treated fairly.
- Working with you to create a plan if things go wrong or you become unsafe.

### **We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by:**

- Supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible. This includes things like going to school, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities.
- Helping do your very best at school. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it.
- Helping you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences. Celebrating your achievements.

### **We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by:**

- ALWAYS making sure that your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future.
- Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you.

### **Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment.**

Making sure you have someone independent to talk to about any problems or issues you may have (to include an explanation about advocates).

Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your reviews. We will make sure there are different ways for you to be involved in your review meetings; in person, in writing.

We will make it easy for you to take part in the Children in Care Council (CiCC.) You can use this to; Have your say about the issues that are important to you.

Help us make sure we are doing the best we can for all children and young people in care.

### **We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history, by:**

Supporting you to understand why you are in care and answering any questions you might have.

Talking to you about the best and safest ways for you to stay in touch with your family. We will make sure the rules about contact are explained to you and easy to understand.

Helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.

## Bedford Borough Council's Pledge for Care Leavers

### **We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by:**

Supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible, like; going to school/ college/work or training, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities. Helping you to attend and do your very best in your training, education or employment. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it. Supporting you to take part in new hobbies and activities to help you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences.

### **We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by:**

ALWAYS making sure your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future. Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you. Having a forum for young people who are leaving care to help have your say about the issues that are important to you and to help us improve our service and making sure we are doing the very best we can for young people.

Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment. Making it easy for you to access an independent advocate to talk to about any problems or issues you may have. Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your reviews, we will make sure there are different ways for you to be involved in your review meetings; in person, in writing.

### **We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history, by:**

Answering any questions you might have about your time in care and what happens next.

Talking to you about the best and safest ways to stay in touch with your family.

Helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.



**We will support you to get ready for your future, by:**

Making sure we learn about your wishes and aspirations for your future and leaving care.

Working with you to create a Pathway Plan that shows how we will support you in your journey to 16+ Supporting Futures.

Helping you to learn the skills you need to be confident and independent, such as cooking, cleaning and managing money.

Making sure you are aware of all of the options, rights and entitlements available to you as a Care Leaver.

**We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by:**

Supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible, like; going to school/ college/work or training, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities.

Helping you to attend and do your very best in your training, education or employment. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it.

Supporting you to take part in new hobbies and activities to help you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences.

Celebrating your achievements.

**We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by:**

ALWAYS making sure your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future.

Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you.

Having a forum for young people who are leaving care to help have your say about the issues that are important to you and to help us improve our service and making sure we are doing the very best we can for young people.

Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment.

Making it easy for you to access an independent advocate to talk to about any problems or issues you may have.

Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your reviews, we will make sure there are different ways for you to be involved in your review meetings; in person, in writing.

**We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history, by:**

Answering any questions you might have about your time in care and what happens next.

Talking to you about the best and safest ways to stay in touch with your family.

Helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.

**We will support you to get ready for your future, by:**

Making sure we learn about your wishes and aspirations for your future and leaving care.

Working with you to create a Pathway Plan that shows how we will support you in your journey to 16+ Supporting Futures.

Helping you to learn the skills you need to be confident and independent, such as cooking, cleaning and managing money.

Making sure you are aware of all of the options, rights and entitlements available to you as a Care Leaver.





## National Legislative and Policy framework

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Bedford Borough Council's Fostering Service is underpinned by the national legislative and policy framework and principles outlined in the:

### Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 is the primary legislation governing work with children and their families. The key principles of the Act can be summarised as follows:

#### **The Welfare Principle**

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including protecting the child from harm or abuse. The child's welfare should be the 'paramount' consideration of anybody dealing with a child.

#### **Partnership Working:**

It is expected that all professionals supporting and working on behalf of children and young people should work in partnership with families. This includes foster carers. Compulsory powers should only be used when this is better for the child than working with the family on a voluntary basis. Promoting and maintaining contact between children and their families should be a priority wherever possible.

The importance of the child's family is highlighted and the expectation is that, whenever possible, children and young people should be brought up in their own immediate or extended families.

#### **The wishes of the child and/or their parents:**

Finding out and taking account of the wishes of the child and/or their parents in making decisions about the child's future.

The importance of considering key aspects of the child's background is highlighted – the child's religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, and a child's particular needs as a result of any disability, must be taken into account in planning for the child.

#### **What is parental responsibility?**

Parental responsibility is defined in the Children Act 1989 as all the rights, duties, powers, responsibility and authority a parent has for a child or young person and their property.

As children grow older, they assume greater responsibility for themselves. Parents never lose their responsibility for their child, even when they share it with the Social Services Department when the child is subject to a Care Order. The only exception is that when a child is adopted; the new adoptive parents obtain parental responsibility for the child and the birth parents lose it.

#### **Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011**

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 – regulate all fostering services, replacing the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Available online at [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/581/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/581/contents/made)

## **Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)**

This is a statutory instrument that bears similar weight to an Act of Parliament and must be complied with by all parties involved in foster care arrangements. The Children's Act 1989 sets out the principles that underpin fostering practices such as 'The welfare of the child is paramount', 'The Wishes, feelings and Views of the Child are to be obtained as those of parents, and guardians of a child.'

### **Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)**

This describes the minimum standards that the government requires of organisations delivering services. These are used by inspectors to assess the quality of the service and determine the level of compliance of anybody involved in foster care. Each standard also has expected outcomes which have to be achieved by the fostering service.

### **Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)**

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011) contains the requirements set out by government to support local authorities, working with fostering service providers, in giving the best possible care and support to children in foster care. Replaces the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Family Placements (1991).

### **Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010**

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review guidance and regulations came into force in April 2011. This guidance entails all aspects of care planning for children and young people and covers the following areas -

Care Planning, Placement, Case Review, Ceasing to look after a child, Short Breaks, Case Records and Application of the 2010 regulation to children who are in contact with youth justice services.

### **Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015**

In 2015, the government introduced guidance and regulations which introduced a consistent definition of long-term foster care placements across England, and in setting out the key steps and commitments involved for all parties. The changes rightly strengthen the importance of foster care as a permanence option for children and young people in care.

## Understanding Why Children Become Looked After

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Children and young people may need to be cared for a variety of reasons and each individual child or young person will have a care plan drawn to take into account their own unique needs, type of support as well as future planning. A foster carer may be caring for a child with a plan to return home, moving towards independence, adoption, special guardianship, or long-term foster care.

As foster carers you will hear references that a child or young person has come into the care of the local authority as they have suffered from physical, emotional or sexual abuse or from neglect. Here are some definitions of the different types of abuse.

As a local authority we do not always know what the child or young person has experienced in the past so it is important that you are aware of possible indicators and you alert the social worker of the child or young person if you see evidence of them. It is important to record these in your foster carer records, however insignificant they may appear it can help to piece together the whole picture. These are some of the experiences that some of our children may have lived through. Other forms of harms can also be experienced in by our children.

### Physical abuse

Happens when parents or adults deliberately inflict injuries on a child, or do not protect the child from injury.

#### **Possible indicators of physical abuse are:**

- Unexplained injuries – bruises, scars, bites or burns, particularly if they are recurrent injuries of varying ages and types or in unusual places
- Child shows fear about returning home
- Child covering certain areas of their body i.e. oversized clothing
- Discomfort in a particular area of their body especially when undertaking an activity
- Withdrawal from physical contact
- Bruising on very young babies (Please note that bruising can have difference appearance on different skin hues)

### Neglect

Happens when a parent or carer fails to meet a child's essential needs for food, clothing, shelter or medical care, or when children are left without proper supervision that leaves them unsafe or unprotected.

#### **Possible indicators of neglect are:**

- Consistently unkempt, dirty appearance
- Medical needs of child unmet
- Delay in the child's development without other clear cause
- Lack of responsiveness with peers or adults in everyday social situations
- Behaviour such as head banging or rocking
- Repeated failure by parents/carers to prevent injury
- Consistently inappropriately clothed for the weather
- Hazardous living conditions
- Failure to attend any sort of appointments
- Non-organic failure to thrive

## Sexual abuse

This form of abuse occurs when an adult or older child involves a child in sexual activity to which the child does not or cannot consent because of their age or understanding.

### **Possible indicators of sexual abuse are:**

- Withdrawn, fearful or aggressive behaviour to other children or adults
- Poor concentration at school or learning problems which do not match intellectual ability
- Behaviour with sexual overtones inappropriate to age
- Complaints of genital itching or pain
- Unexplained abdominal pain
- Distrust of a familiar adult or anxiety about being left with a particular person, relative, babysitter or lodger
- Unexplained gifts or money
- Apparent secrecy
- Wetting day or night when previously dry and clean
- Severe sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Chronic illness, especially throat infections
- Venereal disease or other sexually transmitted diseases
- Marked reluctance to take part in physical activity or to change clothes for PE etc.
- Phobias or panic attacks
- Self-mutilation or attempted suicide
- Running away from home

## Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that affects children and young people every year in the UK. It can happen to any young person whatever their background, gender and age. Many victims of Child Sexual Exploitation have been groomed by an abusing adult who may befriend them and make them feel special in some way through inducements like gifts and attention. Victims may be targeted in person and/or online.

### **Possible indicators of sexual exploitation are:**

- Going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- Regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- Appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- Associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- Having older boyfriends and girlfriends
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- Mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

## Emotional abuse

Occurs when parents or carers do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional wellbeing of children or young adults in their care. Symptoms of this appear in the form of threats, taunting or belittling causing them to become nervous, withdrawn, aggressive, or display abnormal behavioural traits.

Bedford Borough Council have online training available to its foster carers on all of the above forms of abuse as well as other forms of harm that can occur to some of our Children Looked After.

### Possible indicators of emotional abuse are:

- Very low self-esteem
- Lack of any sense of fun
- Excessively clingy or attention seeking behaviour
- Over reactions to mistakes or over anxious to please
- Substantial failure to reach potential in learning
- Self-harming
- Compulsive rituals
- Unusual patterns of response to others showing emotion

## The Team Around a Child looked after

A child looked after will have involvement with many services from the point of coming into care, being looked after, after returning home, or being given permanency with an alternative carer, and subsequently becoming independent.

### Adoption Teams

We help to find permanent families for children and ensure children moving from foster care to adoption have a smooth transition

### Foster Carers

We look after the children who cannot remain in the care of their parents or family

### Child Social Workers:

Family Safeguarding Service, Children Looked after Service, Assessment, and 0-25 Service. We are here to look after the needs of the child, and we do that by working closely with all members of the team

### Connected persons

We look after children whom we may be related to or have a connection with prior to them coming into care

### Quality Assurance

We ensure that all parts of Children's Services operate effectively, using audits and other tools to monitor performance

### CAMHS Targeted Team

We support everyone in the team to help children with their emotional wellbeing and mental health needs

### Virtual School

We support everyone in the team to help all children looked after and care leavers with their educational needs to enable them realise their full potential. We work with all schools and settings that Bedford foster children attend

### Care Leavers Service

We help to ensure that young people reaching the age of 18 have a smooth transition into adulthood as they leave care

### Fostering Marketing and Recruitment Officer

They recruit new foster carers to Bedford Borough

### Permanency Team

We work with children who have are to remain in care till adulthood

### Supervising social workers and Children's Practitioners.

We support foster carers and make sure they have what they need to care for children in placement, and that everyone is safe



# Care Plans and Types of fostering Arrangements

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## Care Plans

Care Plans are made when a child first becomes 'Looked after' and cover attributes such as:

- Where a child will be residing, who the primary carer will be, and the type of fostering arrangement
- The child or young person's access to education including what educational establishment they will attend,
- The child or young person's health and wellbeing including the identification of the individuals who would take responsibility for the doctor and hospital appointments,
- How the child or young person's needs around ethnicity, religion and culture will be respected,
- Contact - how often a child or young person will see their family and persons important to them.

The children's social worker will collaborate with the child to ensure their involvement in writing these plans including how they feel. Plans will be updated regularly at Review meetings where it is important that children and young people attend these meetings so that their opinions are listened to and considered. Other plans may include a Placement Plan, permanency plan, health plan, Personal Education Plan, Keeping Safe Plan or Pathway Plan – all of these will be supported by social workers.

For post 18 arrangements please refer to Staying Put Policy available by referring to [https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/files/staying\\_put.pdf](https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/files/staying_put.pdf)

## Types Fostering Arrangements:

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

Bedford Borough operates a Tier Progression fostering scheme which incorporates all of approved foster carers. All Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). The Tier Progression scheme has three levels linked to a Task, Skills and Competency (TSC) Framework and weekly fees are paid to carers according to their tier level. The TSC framework sets out a list of competencies that foster carers must be able to demonstrate at each tier level.

It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the tier levels if evidencing required competencies and skills.

Children Looked After may be placed with our approved foster carers under these five main arrangements: Short term, long term, short breaks, connected persons and parent and child arrangement.

## Short Term

Some carers look after children short term. These are carers who will take children and young people and look after them until it is clear what their longer term plans are. This could involve bridging children to adoption or a permanent foster family, for the child to return to their birth family or a move towards independent accommodation. It is difficult to define how long this short term is as it will depend on individual circumstances and the care plan. It can be for a few weeks or go on for over a year.

## Long Term

This is a foster placement made with foster carers who are prepared to make a commitment to a child or young person until they reach adulthood.

Many of the children and young people who are cared for in foster care are unable to return to their birth parents. Each fostering team has a nominated long-term worker who works in this area and help to match carers and children who require a long term placement. If you are caring for a child for whom the care plan is long-term foster care and you feel you could make this commitment, you should discuss this with the child or young person's social worker and also your supervising social worker. Alternatively you may be caring for a child or young person for whom a long-term placement has to be found. The social worker for long-term fostering will work with you and the child or young person's social worker to identify a placement and make plans to move the child on in a planned and child centred way to long-term foster carers.

## The process

There is a clear process to be undertaken when considering a long-term placement. This provides time to ensure that the long term needs of the child or young person are well matched with what the foster carer is able to offer. If through this process it appears to be a good match, then arrangements will be made to consider linking the child or young person with the foster carer(s). The linking application is presented to the Agency Decision Maker. If the matching/ long term linking is agreed then the foster carer will be notified and the child/ children will receive a certificate to confirm that their placement is linked long-term.

There may be some occasions when it is considered that the child or young person should remain long-term with a particular foster carer but it is not considered to be in the best interests of the child or young person to formally link them to the foster family. This decision would be made through the review process for the child or young person.

## Short breaks

Short breaks are planned support for foster homes and agreed support for carers across tier levels. This is not suitable for each child and has to be reviewed on regularly.

## Connected Persons

Also known as Kinship Carer, is where a child is placed with a relative, friend, or other connected persons.

## Parent / Child

Carers provide assessments of parent's ability to care for their child as part of an agreed plan.





# Support for Children Looked After

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## Child Social Worker Visit

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 set out common requirements for the visiting of all children who are looked after by the Local Authority. It is good practice that when a Child Looked After is placed they should be accompanied by the social worker to the placement. Following this, the child's social worker must visit the child in the placement at the following intervals, subject to the exceptions. The role of the Child Social Worker is to work alongside the foster carer to ensure that the needs of the child looked after are met.

- On the day the child is placed, to assist in the placement process;
- Within one week of the start of any placement;
- Intervals of not more than six weeks during the first year of the placement;
- Thereafter, at intervals of not more than six weeks (or 3 months if the placement is intended to last until the child is 18).
- In addition, the Care Planning and Fostering (miscellaneous amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 state in regulation 28 (3A):

Where a child is in a designated long-term foster placement and has been in that placement for at least one year, and the child should be of sufficient age and understanding and has agreed to be visited less frequently than required by paragraph (2)(c) visits after the first year may take place at intervals of not more than six months. Any decision to extend the frequency of visits as previously outlined must be agreed by the IRO at a Child looked after Review.

N.B. These are minimum requirements and the Looked after Review may recommend more frequent visits. The frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and visits should be made whenever reasonably requested by the child or foster carers regardless of the status of the placement.

- In addition, the child's social worker should visit:
  - a. Whenever reasonably requested to do so by the child;
  - b. As soon as a complaint is received from the child or from another person relating to the child concerning the standard of care they are receiving; or
  - c. If there is any proposal to remove the child from placement where concerns have been raised about his/her welfare.

This applies to all new placements where, for example, a child moves from one placement to another. Some visits should be unannounced. (The foster carers should be informed by the child's social worker at the time of placing if there will be occasional unannounced visits and the reason for this explained.) Meetings involving a child e.g. Looked After Reviews, do not in themselves constitute a visit, unless time is taken outside of the meeting to talk with and spend time with the child.

The child's social worker should on occasion take the child out from the placement (for example for a snack or a visit to a park) as this can strengthen the relationship between the child and the social worker and is also in the interests of child protection in that the child may feel more able to discuss issues that are of concern to him/her.

## Voice of the Child

We all know it is important to keep children and young people at the heart of all we do. The Children's Act (amongst other policies and legislations) tell us that children and young people must have their voices heard and views considered when decisions are being made. In Bedford Borough Council, the Engagement and Development Team have initiated a number of activities for children such as the Brilliant Activities in School Holidays (BASH), The Engagement and Development Team. Bedford Borough Council consider the role of the foster carer as integral in supporting the voice of the child, as foster carers will have a good understanding of the feelings, wishes and needs of children in care.

Each month, the team support voice groups online for children and young people. These are special sessions for the specific groups and focus on the experiences of children and young people and how we can support them better. Each session is themed around a topic highlighted by children and young people. Our Care Leavers forum meet both online and in person. To say thank you to children and young people for every four sessions they attend (BASH is not included) they will receive a £20 Amazon voucher.

## The Engagement and Development Team

The Engagement and Development Team are in Children's Services and our sole aim is to support children and young people to get involved and have their voices heard. The team run groups each month and activities in the school holidays. The groups and activities are designed to support children and young people to meet other people, learn new things, have lots of fun and of course have their say on the issues that are important to them. Each month children and young people will receive a letter from us with dates and details of activities. A majority of the work we do are for children and young people known to or open to social care; children looked after, care leavers, children and young people on a child protection or child in need plan, children supported by an SGO, those who are adopted and kids who share (the birth children of foster carers).



## Kids Who Share

Kids Who share is a support group for children whose family foster. This service offers foster carers own children the opportunity to meet other children and young people who are in a similar family settings. Kids Who Share have their very own monthly online group and are also invited to join all of our other activities including SHOUT and BASH.

Who Share also have a fun, free youth-club group which runs every month on the Mondays listed below from 5pm - 6pm. It gives the children the opportunity to meet and socialise with other children and young people who share their homes with children in foster care. It is a great way to have fun, have their voice heard and share their thoughts.

Please come along to any or all of the upcoming groups

Email: [voice@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:voice@bedford.gov.uk) Tel: 01234 718440

## SHOUT

SHOUT is a monthly youth group for children and young people known to or open to social care 'children looked after, care leavers, children and young people on a child protection or child in need plan, children supported by an SGO, those who are adopted and kids who share (the birth children of foster carers'. We have two age ranges 8-12 and 13+. The group is a safe and informal space for children and young people to have fun and make new friends – we also have regular meet the manager sessions and do activities to help children and young people share their views so we can help to make a difference to others. Food is provided and support with transport can be arranged.

## BASH (School Holiday Activities)

BASH stands for Brilliant Activities in the School Holidays and are open to children and young people known to or open to social care; children looked after, care leavers, children and young people on a child protection or child in need plan, children supported by an SGO, those who are adopted and kids who share (the birth children of foster carers). All activities are free to all the above children and will vary in age, they are all fun and include: climbing, paddle boarding, arts and crafts, cooking, laser tag, movies, sports and lots more. Before each of the school holidays we will write to children and young people and share the fun and exciting plans; booking is always on a first come and first served basis.



## Independent Advocacy Service:

Bedford Borough Council offers a free independent advocacy service run by Barnados for children. The Advocacy service is offered to young people who may have been in care or are currently in care. It offers a young person the opportunity:

- to have their say;
- to talk to someone if they have run away, gone missing and they want to talk to someone for young people who have a disability, have short breaks (respite) or live in a residential unit.
- To house them below the age of 18 years old or young people up to 25 years old in education but have been open to Children Services,
- To support them at Child Looked After Reviews, Personal Educational Meetings, etc.
- To help them understand decisions made about them, their care, and their future
- For Information shared that can be kept confidential unless there is a risk of harm to her or someone else.

Your Young person can contact Barnados at: [barnadosyoungpeople@barnados.org.uk](mailto:barnadosyoungpeople@barnados.org.uk)

Text: 07763580336

Telephone: 08009177947

## Support for Our Foster Carers

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### Allowances and fees

The amount of money our foster carers are paid depends on their skills level and experience, combined with the age and number of children they are looking after. As a Bedford Borough Foster Carer, you will receive a weekly allowance plus a weekly fee for each child. All approved foster carers start at Tier 1 or Tier 2, depending on prior skills and experience.

Tier 3 carers are specialist carers with the additional skills and experience to look after children and young people who display challenging behaviours or have complex needs. Tier 3 carers will also be skilled in being able to provide mentoring and support to other foster carers.

Allowances and expenses for the child are also paid for a variety of other reasons such as travel, clothing, birthdays, festivals and holidays. Contact your Supervising social worker for further details on your progression as a professional carer as well as any allowances that you might be entitled to.

With regards to taxes and national insurance contributions, many foster carers are exempt from paying taxes on some of their fostering allowances and earnings. Please see [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance) for the most up to date information about tax. We ask that you contact HMRC for further details on this and visit [www.gov.uk/national-insurance-credits](http://www.gov.uk/national-insurance-credits)

Further, Bedford Borough Council recommend that all foster carers have Building and Contents Insurance and ensure that you have comprehensive policies in respect to car insurance and a valid driving licence where applicable. Moreover, you must inform your insurers of your status as a foster carer. We ask that you provide all relevant documents to your Supervising social worker annually.

### Birthdays, religious and festive payments

Bedford Borough Council understands that special occasions for children who are looked after are important and should be celebrated in order to ensure that children feel valued, wanted and have a sense of belonging. Therefore, we pride itself in being able to support carers to provide carers with the support to celebrate special occasions for Children who are looked after. We consider festive, religious and birthday occasions essential and therefore, we will provide payments towards this occasions to ensure that foster carers can make these occasions notable. Please contact your Supervising Social Worker for further details on these amounts and how to claim for these.

## Fostering Network

Foster carers here at Bedford Borough Council have an automatic membership with Fostering Network and have access to a wide range of support and advice. The website has a large library of policies and practice information as well as links to legal advice and support during allegations. They also offer independent support and advice in cases of 'allegation', being on hold, deregistration or disagreements you might have with the Council. They provide support during the Independent Review Mechanism which will be described further below.



Website: [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

## The Bedfordshire Foster Care Association

The Bedfordshire Foster Care Association endeavours to support and represent all foster carers registered with Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. As a Bedford foster carer, you are automatically a member of the association.



The association is run by foster carers for foster carers. The association is independent of either fostering service, although we receive a grant from both Local Authorities that allows us to be able to run subsidised social events for fostering families. We are members of the regional Foster Carer Associations steering group overseen by the Fostering Network. The association is run by a committee. The committee members are all foster carers and collectively have considerable experience of fostering. We welcome new committee members and ideas so that we can always move forward with what we are able to do.

Bedfordshire Foster Care Association (BFCA) has been in operation for many years supporting foster carers and their families at first in Bedfordshire and now in the two Unitary Authorities. Our key aim is to provide the independent support that carers need so that the outcomes of the children placed with them will be maximised. As part of this aim the Association currently supports foster carers looking after children looked after by Bedford Borough Council.

Our main roles in Bedford have traditionally been:

- a) Organising regular social get together and occasional support groups that allow carers and children to interact with others who understand what it is like to foster. These are arranged for all of the fostering family.
- b) Providing confidential information, guidance and support to carers whenever they need it
- c) Referring carers to additional support networks if needed
- d) Representing carers on corporate parenting group
- e) Sharing best practice with foster carers

Our main line of communication is via a closed Facebook page that advertises our events as well as provides information for carers about developments in fostering and parenting. Now given Facebook rules you need to be a Facebook 'friend' with someone who is already a member to join the group. This can be arranged if you are a new carer who doesn't know anyone. This is a closed, private group. If you are not yet a member of this group then please email at the address mentioned in the next paragraph.

We also maintain an email address [ask@bedsfostercarers.co.uk](mailto:ask@bedsfostercarers.co.uk) that is regularly monitored that allows members to seek advice or discuss issues confidentially if they need it as well.

Although officially all foster carers looking after children in both Authorities are automatically members, over the last year the number of foster carers who have taken an active role in running the BFCA has reduced significantly. As with all voluntary groups we are always seeking new members who would be interested in helping to help take the work we do forward.

### Supervising social worker

All approved foster carers will have an allocated, suitably qualified supervising social worker. The allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe caring practices. This will include an understanding that they must work within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the agency's policies, procedures and guidance.

The supervising social worker must also ensure that the foster carers' training and development needs are identified, and that newly approved carers work towards completing the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Workbook. They also have the responsibility to ensure foster carers are familiar and made aware of new policies and guidance.

The foster carer(s) should be fully aware of the Notification of Significant Events and the need to immediately report to their supervising social worker or Fostering Agency the following:

- The death of a child;
- A serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with them;
- The outbreak at the foster home of any infectious disease (which in the opinion of a general practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be notified);
- An allegation that a child placed with foster parents has committed a serious offence;
- They have concerns about a child placed with them of being sexually exploited;
- The police visiting the foster carer's home as a result of a serious incident relating to a child placed there;
- A child placed with the foster carer(s) who has gone missing;
- Any serious concerns about the emotional or mental health of a child, such that a mental health assessment would be requested under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- The child's allocated social worker should be contacted for specific advice or support in relation to the child and their Care Plan and Placement Plan.

## Supervision Visits

A programme of supervision visits should be set up and agreed between the foster carer and the supervising social worker from the time of the foster carer's approval, and endorsed by the supervising social worker's line manager.

### **Supervision is essentially a supportive and enabling two way process to:**

- Ensure the foster carers understand how they contribute to the local authority's services for children;
- Enable foster carers to contribute effectively to the plans for the children for whom they are caring;
- Provide appropriate monitoring and feedback on the foster carers' work to ensure National Standards for Foster Carers are fully met;
- Complete personal development plans for each carer, which are linked to their training and their annual review;
- Support foster carers by providing advice or making this available from elsewhere as appropriate;
- Give foster carers an opportunity to raise any problems and make sure they are addressed appropriately;
- Acknowledge the challenges and demands that the fostering tasks make on foster families and ensure appropriate support is available;
- Recognise and address any difficulties the foster carers' own children may be experiencing arising from fostering;
- Assist foster carers to work in an anti-discriminatory way that respects and promotes individual differences.

### **The agenda for each meeting should cover:**

- Matters arising from the last supervision;
- Personal issues, e.g. effect of a placement on the foster carer's own family, changes in the carer's situation and circumstances etc.

### **Child/ren in placement:**

- Their health, cultural, educational, leisure and contact needs - and any support needs;
- Progress and work with respect towards each child's Care Plan;
- Any accidents, injuries and illnesses experienced by each child;
- Any complaints in relation to children placed with them and their outcomes;
- Any concerns around behaviour management in relation to children they are caring for;
- Any other significant events (see above);
- Any medication, medical treatment or first aid administered.
- Training/development issues for the foster carers and their family;
- Safe caring and health and safety issues

## Training

Bedford Borough's Adoption and Fostering Service Learning and Development programme contains a wide spectrum of learning opportunities that have been developed from the feedback and suggestions from our carers and adopters, whilst ensuring that is also relevant to the needs of the children and young people that we care for.

In line with our service vision 'to have a professional and highly skilled workforce that is effectively trained and supported', it is very important to us that everyone involved in our service has available to them the appropriate level of training, support and the opportunity to be involved so that they feel valued, respected and equipped with the skills and expertise to help our children and young people achieve their potential.

Development opportunities are available through a range of blended learning approaches, including face to face courses, virtual and e-learning. We review our programme annually and each year offer a number of new specialised courses from our training staff and experts in their field.

Foster Carers may apply for any training course within the programme that they feel would enable them to further develop their skills and knowledge. We also offer a range of supplementary courses that help you to develop your expertise in fostering and to meet a wider range of needs.

The core training courses offered are below which are a combination of face to face and virtual sessions. Where appropriate and agreed by their Supervising social worker, carers could consider accessing these courses through online portals. You can book a space on any of these courses by emailing [Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk) or speaking to your Supervising social worker.

### Foster Care Agreement:

You should receive this when you are first approved as a foster carer. Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations (2011) states what needs to be included within the Foster Care Agreement. It is a document which outlines what is expected of you and what you can expect from Bedford Borough Council. It will also include your approval details on it. Your supervising social worker should go through this with you to ensure that you understand it fully. You should then sign a copy which will be placed on your foster carer file and you should have a copy to keep for yourself.

### Supervision Agreement:

This should be completed with your supervising social worker and will include information about the frequency of your supervision and the areas of discussion that need to be covered.

### Letter of Approval:

When you are approved you should also receive a Notice of Approval which will include all the information about your approval as a foster carer.

### Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

Bedford Borough Council offers The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) support to foster carers as we recognise that you might need to contact us for urgent issues when the office is closed. EDT provides continuous cover outside of office hours, for emergencies such as reporting a child that has been harmed, or young people missing. This number is only for urgent matters. Normally you will need to leave a message and the duty social worker will call you back to discuss your concern.



## Core Courses

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### Title: Developing Cultural Awareness

These discussion led workshops are designed to help you develop your practical skills, language & understanding of the differences in a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Through the workshops, we aim to offer a safe space to ask questions and gently challenge you around areas you may not have thought about before.

All carers will be encouraged to attend a minimum of two sessions per year.

### Title: First Aid

Details: Mandatory paediatric first aid provided by TJ Training. This includes theory as well as practical skills so that you have a full understanding of how to support a child in a medical crisis, why first aid is given in a particular way and the skills to implement this.

### Title: Skills to Foster Preparation Course

Details: This is a preparation course for all prospective foster carers. This course aims to give all carers a foundation knowledge in all areas of fostering and to meet with some of our amazing foster carers and looked after young people.

### Title: Skills to Foster Update Course (Approved Carers)

Details: This is an update of the Skills to Foster Preparation Course for all foster carers who have been approved 3 years or more.

This course should be updated every 3 years as a refresher course and contributes to carer's professional development. Topics will include all aspects of fostering, including the foundations of fostering from attachment and the secure base, empathy and caring for vulnerable children.

### Title: Skills to Care Preparation Course (Connected Persons Carers)

Details: This is a preparation course for all prospective connected persons foster carers who may remain as foster carers for named young people, or who may go on to become Special Guardians.

This course aims to give all carers a foundation knowledge in all areas of fostering and to prepare them for caring for someone else's child who has experienced trauma and loss. We will also look at how we promote contact and a child's identity, and to consider what Special Guardianship Order, what they are, what they offer and the support available.

### Title: Safer Caring

Details: To consider the purpose behind safer caring and its relationship to the Secure Base Model. We will consider how we apply safer caring to all aspects of fostering. We will look at the safer caring document and think about what we would expect from someone to provide safe care for a looked after child.

## **Title: Keeping Young People Safe Online**

Details: We will look at the different Apps and risks to using the internet and social media and how we can protect and support young people to keep safe online. We will share what other foster carers are doing to keep their young people safe and the resources available to everyone to be aware of the changing risks and

## **Title: Attachment & Secure Base Module**

Details: We will look at how to carers can help children to develop a secure base through the care they receive. We will also look at different activities that help to develop a trusting, secure relationship, needed as part of creating a secure base for young people in care.

## **Title: Recording & Reporting**

Details: This course is designed to support carers to know what should be recorded, how and when information is used. We will consider the implications of GDPR and how information might be shared and used.

## **Title: Court Room Skills**

Details: We will be exploring the court process; what is required of those who attend; what is the court seeking from foster carers giving evidence or through their records; and how to give good evidence. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about giving evidence and anything else regarding court work in relation to children at risk of harm.

## **Title: Legislation and Delegated Authority**

Details: We will be developing our understanding about the legislation that foster carers and the local authority work under. We will consider how and why delegated authority is used and how we might use it to improve the care and decision making for children looked after.



## **Title: Identity & Culture**

Details: This course aims to explore the importance of identity for children looked after and how foster carers can support and develop a strong and positive identity. We will also consider in impact of culture on identity and how we can promote that in a meaningful way.

## **Title: Supporting Family Time**

Details: Family time ( or contact as it used to be called) between children and their birth families should always be promoted in the most meaningful way possible. We will look at how that can be achieved, the purpose of family time and think about ways this could be improved.

## **Title: Protective Behaviours**

Details: We will explore the different risks and ways that carers can protect themselves while caring for vulnerable children. We will also explore the ways we can support children to develop their own understanding of risk and ways to keep themselves safe in different contexts.

## **Title: Introduction to Attachment & Developmental Trauma (CAMHS)**

Details: This workshop, provided by CAMHS, will look at the impact that trauma has on the development and functioning of the brain alongside young people's understanding of the world around them. We will also consider how we can help to repair the damage and support young people to reach their full potential.

## **Title: Emotional Regulation (CAMHS)**

Details: This workshop, provided by CAMHS, will look at how we support children to learn the valuable skill of regulating and understanding their emotions. We will look at how carers regulate their own emotions and the unconscious signals that we give young people that helps them to manage and respond to challenging situations or memories.

## **Title: Having Difficult Conversations (CAMHS)**

Details: This workshop, provided by CAMHS, will look at how we support children to explore, process and come to terms with difficult stories, themes and experiences, whether they be past, present or future. We will think about the challenges as well as techniques in talking with children of different trauma, ability and developmental ages.

## **Title: Thinking About the Impact of Secondary Trauma**

### **(Looking After Yourself Sessions) (Online)**

Details: We will look at how caring for children and young people who have experienced trauma and loss, has an impact on ourselves. We will consider how we can recognise and manage our experience of secondary trauma and find ways to reduce the impact on ourselves and our families.

## **Title: Reflective Space on the Role of Fostering**

### **(Looking After Yourself Sessions) (Face to Face)**

Details: This is an active session offering foster carers the opportunity to support one another and share their experience of fostering. Through discussion, we will look at ways we can support one another and manage our own experience of stress or challenging situations.

## **Title: Supporting the Well Being of Men who Foster**

### **(Looking After Yourself Sessions) (Virtual)**

Details: We will look at the issues for men who foster, how this can impact on their role in caring for children and young people and how other male foster carers manage these pressures and stress. We will also explore the support available for male foster carers and ways this could be developed.

## **Title: Managing Stress around Significant Events**

### **(Looking After Yourself Sessions) (Online)**

Details: We will look at how significant events throughout the year have an impact on the behaviour and emotional regulation of children and young people we care for. We will consider our own hopes, wishes and expectations around significant events and how we can support ourselves and others to navigate through these periods.

## **Title: TSDS Workshop**

Details: This is an active session. Foster carers are able to ask questions and receive guidance and support in completing the Training, Support and Development Standards workbook. All foster carers in England are expected to complete in their first 12 months (18 months for Connected Persons Foster Carers) of fostering.

## **Title: The Teen Brain Foundation Course**

Details: This course will consider the impact of the hormonal and developmental changes in the brain during adolescence. We will consider how changes in the brain has an impact on the mood, understanding, motivation and behaviour of teenagers.

## **Title: Teen Brain Foundation Course**

Details: This course will further explore the impact of the hormonal and developmental changes in the brain during adolescence. We will consider we respond to young people and how we can change our communication, behaviour and expectations to support young people to reach adulthood successfully.

## **Title: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder FASD**

Details: We will develop an understanding of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, the diagnosis, signs and impact of this disorder on individuals and their carers. Carers will be encouraged to think about the strategies they use in responding to children and young people with these needs.

### **Title: Lifestory Work**

Details: We will look at how foster carers contribute to memory keeping for our children looked after and where it goes. We will consider what the benefits are for our young people. We will share the experiences and methods that some of our carers use to keep memories in a meaningful way for young people.

### **Title: Allegations**

Details: Presented by our Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), we will explore statutory role and the process of investigating allegations. We will consider why allegations are made and what we can do to limit the potential for allegations. We will also identify how you can be supported if an allegation is made against you or someone in your household.

### **Title: The Benefits of Play**

Details: This is an active course and there will be some mess making! Based on the idea of Neuro-dramatic Play, we will explore the benefits of play for our children looked after and how we can use it in a variety of ways to support the development and emotional well-being of our young people.

### **Title: Preventing Placement Breakdowns**

Details: Learning from research and our own experiences, we will think about how we understand and support children looked after alongside what carers might need to maintain a fostering placement. This will include thinking about the information we receive, how we work together and how we communicate with others.

### **Title: Separation & Loss**

Details: All looked after young people have experience of separation and loss. This course will aim look at the experiences of young people, the impact of loss on their behaviour, identity and self-esteem, and how we can help young people to come to terms with their losses and help them to feel more settled and effective.

### **Title: Moving Children onto Adoption & Permanency**

Details: This course will explore how we can support children to move in the best way onto permanent arrangements when they cannot return to their birth family, why introduction planning and reviews are so important and how do we reduce further loss and trauma for children.

### **Title: Caring for Children with Additional Needs**

Details: With the input from experienced foster carers, we course will look at how we manage complex needs for children looked after. We will look how we support foster carers as well as at the support available from external services and schools and how we can give children similar opportunities and experiences to any other child.

### **Title: Prevent**

Details: This course is provided by the police to help foster carers to develop awareness of how young people might be groomed by different groups or organisations. The course will help carers to know how to respond to the young person in their care and where to seek support and advice if they have concerns about the young people in their care, or perhaps even their friends.

### **Title: County Lines**

Details: This course will aim to inform carers about what County lines is; how urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to other counties. We will look at how children and young people may be criminally exploited as well as other forms of criminal exploitation include child sexual exploitation, trafficking, gang and knife crime. We will also look at the language and culture within this community, including the phrases that young people may use to refer to county lines.

The full training programme can be viewed at [fostering.training@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:fostering.training@bedford.gov.uk)

## E-Learning Opportunities with Bedford Borough Council

We provide a number of options for e-learning. These can be completed in your own time, at your own pace.

### AC Education Online Courses

#### **Core Knowledge & Values**

- Attachment and Loss
- Children's Rights
- Communicating with Children and Young People
- Equality and Diversity
- Family & Friends (Connected Persons) Care
- Food, Nutrition and Associated Behaviours
- Fostering and Birth Children
- Managing Allegations
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Men in Foster Care
- Mindfulness
- Multi-Agency Working
- Promoting Health and Developments
- Reflective Practice
- Secondary Trauma and Workplace Stress
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- Suicide Awareness and Support
- Understanding Child Development
- Safeguarding & Child Protection Skills
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Introduction to Safeguarding
- Peer on Peer Abuse
- Radicalisation
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Skills
- Therapeutic Care
- Healing Environments
- Life Story Work
- Play Therapy
- Positive Parenting Techniques for Parents and Carers
- Resilience and Recovery

- Social Pedagogy
- Therapeutic Parenting with Children who have Suffered Sexual Abuse
- Therapeutic Re-parenting
- Transitions: Changing Placements
- Transitions: The Move to Permanency
- Supporting Adolescence
- Drug and Alcohol Awareness for Parents and Carers
- Exploring Healthy Relationships
- Making Sense of Adolescence
- Relationships and Sex Education
- Understanding Sexual Health and Contraception
- Youth Justice System
- Working with Children Looked After (Fostering, Residential Care & Adoption)
- Caring for a Child of a Different Ethnicity
- Children and Young People who Run Away or Go Missing
- County Lines
- Court Skills for Foster Carers
- Fostering Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
- Gangs, Guns and Knives
- Parent and Child Placements
- Permanency
- Police Interviews – your role
- Promoting Positive Contact
- Promoting the Achievement of Children Looked After in Education
- Record Keeping in Foster Care
- Safer Foster Care
- Staying Put
- Continuing Care
- Supporting Young People 16+ Supporting Futures
- Supporting the Mental Health Needs of Children Looked After
- The Role of the Foster Carer
- The role of the Panel Member
- Understanding Trauma & Promoting Positive Behaviour
- Bereavement
- Bullying
- Caring for a Child who has been Sexually Abused



- Children and Parental Substance Misuse
- Child Trafficking
- Digital and Internet-Supported Self-Harm
- Emotion Coaching
- Harmful Sexual Behaviours
- Impulsive Behaviours
- Introduction to Positive Behaviours Support
- Self-Harming Behaviours
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- The Impact of Domestic Violence and Abuse
- The Impact of Trauma on Sensory Processing
- The Impact of Parental Mental Health on Parenting
- Trauma and the Impact on Brain Development
- Working in Health & Social Care
- Food Hygiene
- Health and Safety in Social Care
- Human Rights in Social Care
- Infection Control
- Safe Use of Medication
- Working with Disabilities & Special Educational Needs
- ADHD
- Conduct Disorders
- Autism
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia
- Working with Children and Young People with Disabilities
- Keeping Children Safe Online
- Online Safety and Cyberbullying
- Pornography and the Potential Impact on Young People
- Social Media, Selfies and Sexting

If you would like to undertake one of the above e-learning modules then please email [Fostering.training@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Fostering.training@bedford.gov.uk) in order to set up a learner account and be allocated your chosen module. A maximum of two courses can be allocated at one time.

## Safeguarding eLearning with Safeguarding Bedfordshire (Children and Adults)

Safeguarding Bedfordshire offers free eLearning to practitioners in statutory, independent and voluntary agencies delivering services to children, young people and adults in Bedfordshire.

Their eLearning offer has been updated and now includes three levels of core safeguarding training. They also have refreshed their list with new titles and updates content:

- L1 / L2 / L3 Adults
- L1 / L2 / L3 Safeguarding Children
- L1 / L2 / L3 Safeguarding Everyone
- Awareness of Domestic Violence and Abuse
- Child and Adult Sexual Exploitation
- Child Poverty
- Dementia Awareness
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- E-Safety
- Fabricated Illness
- FGM (linked to faith or belief)
- Gang Related Issues and County Lines
- LGBTQ Awareness
- Medication Awareness
- Modern Slavery & Trafficking
- Self-Harm
- Self-Neglect
- Sexual Health
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Supporting Teenagers and Young People
- Toxic Trio
- Radicalisation and Extremism
- Understanding the Impact of Hate Crime
- Working with Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
- And many more.....

Log in or register for a free account by visiting Safeguarding Bedfordshire [www.safeguardingbedfordshiretraining.co.uk](http://www.safeguardingbedfordshiretraining.co.uk)

## Other Training Opportunities

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Foster Carers are encouraged to find their own relevant training opportunities. These should be discussed with the SSW and recorded in the foster carers training log.

We have also been given some other training opportunities to share with you by colleagues in the Borough and webinars with partner agencies. These are listed below.

### Two hour Triple P Discussion Groups

Bedford Borough Council's Early Help Service will be hosting a series of one off Triple P Discussion groups on a variety of issues commonly faced by parents.

These discussions groups explore common problems we face as parents and some of the reasons why they happen. They will share strategies and advice on how you may be able to manage these problems before they occur.

The informal discussion groups are being hosted via ZOOM video conferencing and are open to all parents of children aged between 3 - 12 years.

#### Topics include

- Managing Fighting and Aggression
- Dealing with Disobedience
- Managing Fighting and Aggression

Due to limited places, pre-booking required! To book a place on the Triple P 3-12yrs discussion groups, please contact [Martyn.lee@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Martyn.lee@bedford.gov.uk) or call 07468 472558.

Learn how young people can manage low mood and depression during COVID-19

In an unprecedented time of upheaval and change, it's understandable that many young people's mental health may be particularly vulnerable.

On this course, young people, parents, carers, teachers, and other professionals can learn helpful, practical techniques to cope with low mood and depression during the lockdown period and beyond. You'll examine how to help young people structure their day and improve sleep and diet.

You'll explore how to build positive family communication and learn tips on how to manage your thoughts and feelings, building long-lasting resilience along the way.

This course is over two weeks and requires two hours of study each week.

[www.futurelearn.com/courses/low-mood-during-covid-19?utm\\_campaign=Share+Links&utm\\_medium=futurelearn-run\\_details&utm\\_source=email](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/low-mood-during-covid-19?utm_campaign=Share+Links&utm_medium=futurelearn-run_details&utm_source=email)

## Safer Caring Plan and Risk Assessments

The key emphasis within all the fostering legislation and the Children Act is that the welfare of the children is paramount and that they should feel safe. This is important for all family members, not just those children and young people who are looked after. Safer caring is about good practice and when you were being assessed as a foster carer you should have completed a safer caring family plan. This is a plan which you and your family agree as the 'rules' for your household. It will include day to day things and hopefully will keep your family safe and also provide a framework of acceptable behaviours that can be taught to the child looked after or young person and help them to also feel safe.

Your safer care family plan should consider many areas including ways that you show affection, bedrooms, the way you dress, car travel, taking photographs and video, media and digital technology and so on. Your safer care family plan should be considered every time you have a new placement where you may take into account particular needs of the person being placed with you. Ideally this should be completed at the Placement Planning Meeting and regularly reviewed in collaboration with your Supervising Social Worker (SSW).

Sometimes it may be necessary to do risk assessments. This is a process to ensure that all risks have been considered and a decision is made based on full information. It is not meant to be a process to stop children and young people from doing things but just a way of making the right decision for the children and young people involved. In some situations risk assessments must always be undertaken, for example, children and young people sharing a bedroom. If it is expected that any child or young person who are likely to be sharing a bedroom, including on holidays when bedroom arrangements may need to be different from the foster carers home setting, risk assessments must be undertaken prior to the event (and if a holiday before booking) and discussed with your SSW and CSW if appropriate. Please see template of 'Safer Caring Plan' below under 'Forms'.

## Foster Carer Support Groups: Connecting with Carers

It is recognised by the fostering service that foster carers find support groups to be the most helpful means of support. Support groups are held monthly and foster carers are encouraged to attend these where possible.

There are often invited speakers to support groups so this provides carers with important information and structured support time as well as the more informal aspects of the groups.

Foster carers are also encouraged to buddy up with other foster carers. This can happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers meeting at support groups or training courses. However, supervising social workers can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their fostering career and take on their first placement.

### **At present we offer;**

- Direct support groups – Friday morning once per month
- Virtual daytime connecting with carers – Wednesday morning bi-monthly
- Virtual evening connecting with carers – Wednesday evening bi-monthly

## Foster Carers who care for Teenagers

Bedford Borough Council runs specialist carers support groups for carers. One of these is a carers support group for carers who care for teenagers. These are held every 6 weeks on a Monday evening. They have been virtually, and you are welcome to join in if you are interested in looking after teenagers, or look after teenagers.

## Men's Support Groups

Men who foster have often shared that they benefit from connecting with other men who have similar experiences as them. This support is often in informal settings such as pubs, or other activities and ensures that we give men the opportunity to seek support, advice in a way that feels comfortable to their needs.

If you have any questions regarding the connecting with carers groups above, please contact Libby Dowling in the fostering team on 01234 718718, email the Fostering Training Inbox, [Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk) or contact your Supervising social worker.



## Fostering Responsibilities

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### Confidentiality

Within your role as a foster carer, you will have access to a lot of confidential, sensitive and personal information about the child or young person you are caring for and their family. This information should not be shared with others unless they need to know and should be discussed with your supervising social worker before being shared. All written paperwork and information should be securely stored in a locked cabinet and passed onto the child's social worker should they move on from your care.

### Recording

Under the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 there is a requirement for foster carers to keep daily records of the children they are caring for. There is a training available on how to record daily records. As a foster carer, your recording is essential in understanding the lived experience of a child in care. This information that you record as a foster carer can be requested in court, as part of making care planning decisions, risk assessments and also in addressing any allegations/ disclosures. Therefore, it is imperative that you have a sound understanding of this and attend the relative training around this. Please talk to your supervising social worker for further details. See an example of the Recording sheet below.

### General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

GDPR came into force on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018 and outlines the rules on personal data and how organisations manages this in a transparent and accountable manner. This is both kept either manually (paper) or on computer. Bedford Borough Council can refuse access to some information request on a file if it is felt it has the potential to cause serious harm to any persons relevant. Therefore, it is important that you keep accurate records that are accessible. Your Supervising social worker will talk to you on how to keep suitable records and how to go about requesting access to these.

### Illness/Accident/Injury

Minor illnesses should be reported to your foster child's Social Worker by telephone/email or on their next visit.

Accidents, injuries and serious illness should be reported to the child's Social Worker and your Supervising social worker immediately. If the child's Social Worker is not available, then please notify their manager or the out of hours Emergency Duty Team.

In cases of planned admissions to hospital for operations, the department must be informed as foster carers do not have the authority to sign consent forms for surgery in these circumstances. These are signed either by the natural parent or a representative from the Children's Services Department.

The placement information/delegated authority states clearly in which circumstances you can give consent to medical treatment. In most cases you will be able to give your consent in an emergency, but if not, the following points should be noted:

- a. If urgent medical treatment is needed and a delay in obtaining consent would cause suffering or put the child at risk (following an accident for example), a doctor can exercise their medical prerogative and proceed with treatment.

b. A young person of 16 years or over can consent to treatment/surgery.

See 'Incident form' below – appendix 2.

Please contact your Supervising social worker.

## Delegated Authority

Your supervising social worker and child's social worker will discuss with you which decisions you are able to make such as taking your foster child to the Doctor and which decisions need to be approved by social workers or family such as haircuts, holidays and overnight stays. These decisions can fall under delegated authority which is a provision agreed under at Placement Planning meetings, Looked after review meetings. Please contact your supervising social worker to obtain further details.

[https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/p\\_del\\_auth\\_fc\\_resid.html?zoom\\_highlight=delegated+authority](https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/p_del_auth_fc_resid.html?zoom_highlight=delegated+authority)

## Allegations

The Fostering Network have defined an allegation as “An allegation is an assertion from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has, or may have, behaved in a way that has harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children.

Allegations are more serious than general complaints against foster carers because allegations have to be investigated under the local child protection procedure. Allegations should be treated differently from concerns about poor standards of care.”

We understand that as a foster carer going through an allegation investigation can be a very unsettling and challenging period in your fostering career. Whilst at Bedford Borough Council we take allegations seriously, and want to ensure that they are investigated fairly and robustly. We also want to ensure that you have the appropriate support when such investigations occur, and will encourage you to contact the Fostering Network who offer an advisor as well as someone suitable within the fostering team.

Allegations against foster carers will go to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for your area and will be investigated. You will be supported by an allocated supervising social worker during the process. Your supervising social worker will not be able to discuss the investigation with you until the investigation is completed and after conclusions have been made. We provide training on managing allegations and encourage you to access this.

## Standards of Care Investigations

A Standards of Care investigation will be undertaken when there are child protection concerns but the 'significant harm' threshold is not met. This would be when concerns are expressed in relation to the conduct, attitude or practices of the foster carer; it could include accumulating, worsening 'one off', or continuing low level concerns about day-to-day care.

## Section 47 Investigations (Children Act 1989)

If there is a cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a Section 47 investigation will be initiated.

“Harm” is the “ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child” and it is determined “significant” by “comparing a child’s health and development with what might be reasonably expected of a similar child”.

If ‘significant harm’ is suspected the local authority must make, or cause to be made, such enquires as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child’s welfare.

### **Role of the Fostering Team Manager**

- Be available to you if you have any questions
- Liaise with the Local Authority Designated Officer
- Attend strategy meetings
- Liaise with other professionals involved with the investigation
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiries

### **Role of the Supervising Social Worker**

- Keep you informed of the process and any decisions that are made
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiry
- Attend strategy meetings
- Ensuring you are aware of where you can access independent support
- Will undertake any paperwork required during the process, including household reviews and fostering panel

### **Role of LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)**

The Bedford Borough Council LADO is specifically involved in cases where there is a concern or allegation that someone working or volunteering with children:

- has or may have harmed a child
- may have committed a criminal offence related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

They give advice and guidance on how concerns or allegations should be investigated against adults working with children. This should not be confused with allegations made by children against other children, which is not the remit of the LADO. They do not investigate but must ensure that an appropriate investigation is carried out, whether that is by the police, children’s social care or the employer or a combination of these.

## Foster carer’s fees

If a foster carer is suspended, the continuation of their fostering fee will continue until 6 weeks or HOS to make the decision to extend it. Any allowances for children will cease when a child or young person leaves the placement.



## Independent support for foster carers

If you are subject to an allegation, independent support is provided by Fostering Network. Referrals for support are made on a case-by-case basis, with your agreement as the foster carer, by your supervising social worker. An Independent Support worker is then allocated to your case and they will make direct contact with you.

They will support you through telephone calls, emails, and home visits. They will offer emotional support and also important practical support, helping you to understand the process and procedures regarding allegations, attending any reviews you may have to go to, including the fostering panel; and helping with any documentation you may have to write.

If you are a foster carer facing an allegation and you will be allocated another SSW to support you until the investigation is completed.

Fostering Network also provides independent legal advice for a carer who is subject to an investigation and has an advice line you can contact. Their telephone number is 0800 0407675.

## Use of putting the foster carers on hold

Working Together to Safeguard Children (March 2010) states that putting the foster carers on hold should be considered in any case where:

- there is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm;
- the allegation warrants investigation by Police; or
- the allegation is of such a serious nature it might be grounds for recommending termination of approval.

It will be considered in any situation where the authority does not wish to place any further children with you while it undertakes its enquiries. If you are put on hold, it is 'without prejudice' but you will not be able to continue fostering while the situation is fully investigated.

Support is available to you and you should be kept fully informed of the process and what is happening. Sometimes we are unable to give you much information about the allegation due to the independent nature of the investigation which we would not want to prejudice. We will give you more information as soon as we are able. It is not possible to be able to say how long this may last but BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL will try and deal with things in as short a time as possible but will need to gather all the relevant information in order that a fair assessment is made. You should also not attend foster carer training or support groups during this time.

Suspension should not be seen as an automatic response to an allegation or imposed as a 'knee jerk reaction'; in some cases, it will not be immediately obvious that suspension is appropriate. The need for suspension may only become clear after the information has been shared and/or there has been discussion with other agencies at a strategy meeting.

Alternatively, a Management Planning Meeting can be convened where there is a need for further enquiries in order to ascertain more information about standards of care being provided.

If the information about the foster carer's conduct does not require a strategy meeting, a management planning meeting may be arranged to evaluate the level of concern and to determine the foster carer's suitability to continue working with children in this capacity. This would be a "standard of care enquiry".

## Disclosures

In caring for children who have been through a difficult early start in life, foster children are likely to have experienced trauma and may have been harmed by those close to them. In a foster home, as children start to feel safe and cared for, they may willingly and unknowingly share their experience of the harm and difficult circumstances they have been exposed to. This information should be noted in your daily recordings and shared with your Supervising social worker and the Child's Social Worker as soon as possible. It is important as well that when children share their life experiences that they are not asked leading questions or questioned about the information shared. This requires training in understanding how to manage this information shared by children, and we recommend that you complete training related to this and that you use your Supervision Sessions with your Supervising social worker. The information that children disclose to you about their lived experiences could assist with their care planning, decisions around keeping them safe.

## Children Missing from Care

If a foster child goes missing, please contact the Police, your supervising social worker / duty team and follow the missing children protocol which can be found on the tri-x procedures.

## Supporting Contact with Parents

We are required to promote contact between foster children and their family 'where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote his or her welfare'. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such contact can be managed safely. If necessary, information will be made available to family and friends carers about local contact centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Where a child is Looked After, we are required to endeavour to promote contact between the child and his or her family 'unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare'. The overall objective of the contact arrangements will be included in the child's Care Plan and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child's Placement Plan.

[https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/p\\_contact\\_parents.html](https://bedfordboroughcs.proceduresonline.com/p_contact_parents.html)

## Preparation for Independence

As a foster carer, your role is to promote children and young people in your care to develop skills to prepare them for independence as indicated in their care plan. We will work alongside you to prepare children who are in your care towards independence in a manner that is risk assessed, individualised to the needs and abilities of the child in your care. We will help you think about the choices available and professionals around the child will support to find accommodation that is right for the child in your care. As a foster carer you will have the support of a Child Social worker, Personal Advisor for the Child, and your Supervising social worker to assist you in preparing your child for independent living. Children who are being prepared towards leaving care, will often have a Pathway Plan to prepare them towards independence living.

## Diversity & Equality

Standard 2 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering makes note that foster carers are tasked with “Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care”. Bedford Borough Council places emphasis that foster carers with the support of their supervising social worker work to ensure that all children in their care, have individualised care plans that address their needs, wishes, feelings, and carefully consider their ethnicity, religious, sexual and gender backgrounds and persuasions. Equalities and diversity issues should be reflected in any recording. This can include references to pieces of work where specific consideration has been given to a service user’s needs because of their gender, ethnicity, linguistic ability, sexual orientation, disability, mental health status, caring responsibilities etc. Foster carers can be explicit about these issues and how these have been taken into consideration in practice.

## Meetings Foster Carers Attend

As a foster carer with Bedford Borough Council regards you as a key professional in the Team Around Child (TAC). Your role as a foster carer is essential in ensuring that the lived experiences of the child or young person in your care are shared with the team around the child. Your experience and observations of a young person are important as they can assist in decisions being made about a child’s care plan, future placements, health needs, educational needs, family time with people that are close to them, and decisions on how to keep them safe. It is therefore, that you are expected to attend the following meetings listed below and any other additional meetings related to the welfare of your child.

1. Child looked after ( Review) Meetings ( usually held in your home, school or office)
2. Personal Educational Plan Meetings ( Usually held at school)
3. Safeguarding meetings / Section 47 inquiry meetings
4. Placement Panning meetings ( usually held in your home, school or office)
5. Health meetings ( GP, medicals, )
6. Placement Strategy Meetings
7. Stability Meetings
8. Permanency Planning Meetings
9. CCD ( Complex Case Discussions)

Some meetings are now being held virtually and you are asked to attend using Teams or another suitable video conferencing systems. In order to prepare for the meetings you can speak to your Supervising social worker about what is appropriate you share and ask. Your supervising social worker will explain the purpose of these meetings, your role, and how to present your information beforehand. You will find it helpful to have a small summary of how the child in your care has been, noting dates of appointments, meetings held to share. You can share this summary with your Supervising social worker. If you feel that it would be helpful, you can ask for your supervising social worker to attend the meeting with you.

## **The review of your Approval as a Foster Carer:**

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### **Formal reviews of foster carers will take place at least annually**

In most circumstances there will be an annual review of foster carers, that is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO is usually employed by Bedford Borough Council, but is independent of the fostering service. In some circumstances reviews can take place more frequently in the event of a significant change in circumstances of a foster carer for example or where there are concerns about the care provided by the foster carer as a result of a complaint or allegation.

As well as formal reviews, there will be regular dialogue and feedback between the supervising social worker and the foster carer.

### **Consultation with Foster Carer before the Review**

Prior to the formal review, the supervising social worker will send to the foster carer a copy of the review report to enable them to prepare for the review well in advance. The foster carer will have the opportunity to communicate his or her views verbally or in writing to the supervising social worker.

The supervising social worker will also, as part of the formal review, seek the views of all members of the foster carer's household. They will also obtain the written comments from all the responsible social workers who have had children live with the foster carer since the last formal review. This may be recorded on the social worker's end of placement report. This will include contacting a social worker from outside the authority where appropriate.

The supervising social worker will also seek and take into account the views of any child placed with the foster carer since the last review via the child's social worker.

All reports written will be shared with the foster carer at least 10 days before the review so that nothing is presented without the opportunity to consider what has been written.

### **Formal Review Meeting**

The review will be based on a meeting held between the supervising social worker, the Independent Fostering Review Officer and the foster carer at the foster home. At the review meeting, the agenda as set out in the Foster Carer Review Form will include the foster carer's personal development plan, an evaluation of the training received since the last review, the foster carer's views of the service and support provided as well as the appropriateness of placements made and the care provided by the foster carer.

A Review Form will be completed and any recommendations discussed with the foster carer and recorded. The foster carer should have the opportunity to put their views on the recommendations in writing to be presented to the Fostering Panel or the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) when the Review Form is considered.

### **Presentation to the Fostering Panel or Agency Decision Maker**

A report must be presented to the Fostering Panel on the foster carer's first review for a recommendation, and thereafter every 3 years. This may include where significant changes to the foster carer's approval or the termination of the foster carer's approval are recommended or where any circumstances exist which in the opinion of the Agency Decision Maker require consideration by the Fostering Panel. This may include the situation where an updating

Disclosure and Barring Service check reveals a new concern about the foster carer or a member of the household.

Whether presented to the fostering panel or not, the report will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision as to whether the foster carer remains suitable to foster and whether the terms of approval remain suitable. Where it has been presented to the fostering panel, the Agency Decision Maker will take into account the panel's recommendation.

The supervising social worker will present the review findings and recommendations to the Fostering Panel or Agency Decision Maker in a written report which incorporates the views of the child or children placed, the written views of the foster carer and any report provided by a social worker particularly where concerns have been expressed about a placement with the foster carer. Any recommendations for change in the foster carer's approval should be highlighted in the report.

Where the Review recommends the termination of approval of the foster carer, see Proposal to Terminate Foster Carer's Approval.

Where the Fostering Panel's recommendation is for a different category of approval, see, Proposal to Revise the Terms of the Foster Carer's Approval.

### After the Fostering Panel

The foster carer will be informed in writing by the supervising social worker of the outcome of the review.

A copy of the Review Form and a record of the outcome of the review will be forwarded to the foster carers & retained on the foster carer's case record.



## Representations / Review Procedure

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### Proposal to Terminate Foster Carer's Approval

Where, as a result of a review, the termination of a foster carer's approval is proposed, written notice of the proposal and the reasons must be sent to the foster carer within 7 days of the decision and he or she must be advised that they are able to challenge the decision. They have the opportunity to make representations to the Agency Decision Maker or to request a review by an Independent Review Panel.

The Independent Review Mechanism provide independent panels that review suitability for persons to foster and other decisions made by Bedford Borough Council.

Notification / representations will need to be received by the Panel Administrator within 28 days of the date of the notice of the decision being sent to them. The Panel Administrator and the Independent Review Mechanism will then notify the foster carer within 7 working days of the date when the Panel will reconsider the matter (see also: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-for-a-review-panel-adopters-and-foster-carers>). The foster carer(s) will also be advised of independent support that can be provided by BFCA and the fostering network.

The foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if he or she regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence - see Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure.

If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within the period, a final decision to terminate can be made.

If written representations are received within the period, the matter must be referred to the Fostering Panel for further consideration. A friend or supporter may accompany foster carers wishing to make representations in person to the Panel. Where a foster carer wishes to make representations in person, the Panel Chair may consider the Panel meeting being smaller in the number of members attending.

The Panel will make a new recommendation in relation to the foster carer and a final decision will be made by the Agency Decision Maker taking into account any fresh recommendation made by the Panel.

Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must then be sent to the foster carer within 7 working days of the decision.

Where the termination of the approval of a foster carer is being considered, plans for the termination of any current placement will also be required and made as appropriate.

Where the approval is terminated, the Agency Decision Maker, in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will decide whether to refer the former foster carer to the Disclosure and Barring Service for inclusion of the carer's name on the Children's Barred List.

During this period, as mentioned above, foster carers will continue to have the support of a Supervising social worker and Fostering Network, who provide independent support during this process.

# Proposal to Revise the Terms of the Foster Carer's Approval

## Where the Foster Carer is in Agreement

Where, as a result of a review, the foster care has asked to revise the terms of the approval, a statement must be sent to the foster carer. This should set out whether it is considered that the foster carer or members of their household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs as a result of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met. Subsequently, a request of the foster carer's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms should be made.

Where the foster carer's written agreement is received, the decision to revise the terms of approval may be made immediately.

Foster carers must be in agreement with the terms of their approval and any changes made to them.

## Where the Foster Carer is not in Agreement

Where the Foster Carer does not agree in writing to the revision of their terms of approval, then the representations/review procedure as set out in Section 6.1 Proposal to Terminate Foster Carer's Approval will apply, although this will be considering a change in approval. Foster cares will have access to the IRM procedures as well as access to independent advice and support.

## Updates on Checks

Disclosure and Barring Service checks should be updated every 3 years and if necessary, a review of the foster carer's approval should be carried out immediately to take account of any new information. It is the foster carers responsibility to inform the fostering service as soon as possible of any offences committed or cautions with in the fostering family.

Whilst there is no statutory time interval, as good practice medical information should also be updated at least every 3 years by writing to the foster carer's GP. In the event of any serious concerns about the foster carer's health, a review of the foster carer's approval should be carried out immediately.

## Resignation by Foster Carers

A foster carer may give written notice at any time of their wish to resign from the role. Once written notice has been given, their approval will automatically be terminated 28 days after receipt of the notice. The foster carer cannot withdraw their notice once it has been received, nor can the Agency Decision Maker decline to accept the resignation. Should a foster carer who has applied to resign or who has resigned subsequently wish to foster again, they will need to be assessed under the procedure for Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure. There is no requirement for the fostering panel to be notified of resignations. However, here at Bedford Borough Council, we monitor resignations at panel.

## Retention and Exit Interview

We recognise that the role of being a foster carer can be emotionally, physically and mentally challenging. As outlined under 'Support for Foster carers', we offer a variety of support along your fostering task to ensure that you feel supported and skilled in training for children in care. However, should you feel that you are considering leaving the service, then we ask that you contact your Supervising social worker, or their manager in order to consider what further support we may offer you as we are passionate about retaining our foster carers. Should you still wish to resign from your role as a foster carer with Bedford Borough Council, then we ask that you complete an exit interview to assist us in reflecting on how we can continue to improve on our service.

## Disqualified Foster carers

A person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of a specified offence committed at the age of 18 or over.

A specified offence is defined as an offence against a child, an offence specified in Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the importation/possession of indecent photographs of a child under 16 and any other offence which involves bodily injury to a child (other than common assault or battery).

\*A list of these offences is set out in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, except that it does not include an offence contrary to section 9 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sexual activity with a child) where the offender was under 20 when the offence was committed and the child was aged 13 or over.

In addition, a person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer for the agency (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of an offence specified in paragraph 1 of part 2 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 committed at the age of 18 or over OR falls within paragraph 2 or 3 of Part 2 of Schedule 4, notwithstanding that the offences listed have been repealed.

Where information is provided or updating Disclosure and Barring Service checks reveal that an approved foster carer has been convicted of or cautioned for a criminal offence as a result of which he or she will become a disqualified person unless consent is given, an urgent review of the foster carer's approval should be held - see Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure - and a written report detailing the circumstances leading to the conviction/caution, together with background information from the foster carer's file, must be presented to the Fostering Panel as soon as possible. The report should contain a recommendation on whether consent should be granted to allow the foster carer to continue to be approved as a foster carer for the child or children currently in placement.



A copy of the report should be sent to the Panel Administrator at least 10 working days before the relevant Panel meeting.

Where such information is received, the social worker for any child currently in the placement must be informed and plans for the termination of the placement will also need to be considered as appropriate.

Where the report recommends the termination of approval of the foster carer, the report should be presented to the earliest possible Fostering Panel.

The Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) will consider the recommendation of the Fostering Panel on any such applications.

The decision of the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) will be recorded in writing and a copy placed on the case record of the foster carer.

Written notice of the decision, together with reasons, must then be sent to the foster carer as soon as practicable.

It is important to note that should a foster carer be disqualified from fostering with Bedford Borough Council, and they decide to pursue another agency, that the agency is required to check whether they have been barred from fostering.

## Staying Put

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Bedford Borough Council is committed to preventing social exclusion amongst care leavers and has developed the following “Staying Put” policy in order to ensure that they can continue to live with former foster carers after their 18th birthday and make the transition to independent living at a pace that suits their needs. This includes young people living away from their former foster carer’s home for temporary periods such as attending higher education courses or training.

### The policy sets out:

- The process for extending a foster care placement beyond a young person’s 18th birthday into a “Staying Put” arrangement;
- The financial requirements and benefit issues for young people;
- The financial rates and payment implications for foster carers and “Staying Put” carers;
- The welfare benefit issues for foster carers and “Staying Put” carers;
- The income tax and national insurance implications and issues for “Staying Put” carers.
- This “Staying Put” policy has been developed to address the requirements of the:
  - Children and Families Act 2014;
  - DfE, DWP and HMRC “Staying Put” Guidance 2013;
  - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations and Guidance 2010 (and amendments);
  - Planning Transition to Adulthood for 16+ Supporting Futures (England) Regulations and Guidance 2010 (revised 2014);
  - Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and related Guidance (and amendments);
  - National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services (2011) (and amendments).

## “Staying Put” Definitions

### Definitions Overview

Where possible; DfE, DWP and HMRC definitions and frameworks relating to “Staying Put” have been harmonised. However, given the complexity of the three different legislative frameworks relating to “Staying Put” arrangements, and the fact that some of the legislation does not cover all four countries in the United Kingdom, this has not been wholly possible.

### Department for Education Definitions

The Department for Education’s definition for the term “Staying Put” is used to define the following arrangements where:

A young person who was looked after immediately prior to their 18th birthday (as an eligible child) continues to reside with their former foster carer/s;

The carer/s were acting as foster carers to the child immediately prior to the young person’s 18th birthday (that is, the carers were approved as foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the child had been placed with them by the local authority, or via an Independent Fostering Agency);

A young person is deemed an eligible child, within the meaning of paragraph 19B(2) of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 2989, immediately before he/she reached 18;

The “Staying Put” arrangement is set out in the child/young person’s Pathway Plan;

A proportion of the allowance paid to the “Staying Put” carer/s is paid by the Local Authority Children’s Services under section 23C of the Children Act 1989;

The “Staying Put” arrangement extends until:

The young person first leaves the “Staying Put” arrangement; or

The young person reaches their 21st birthday, if continuously, and still living in the arrangement; or

The young person completes the agreed programme of education or training being undertaken on their 21st birthday, if continuously living in the arrangement.

## Transfer Protocol for Foster Carers

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### Introduction

This policy refers to the movement of registered foster carers between fostering providers where carers are planning on transferring to Bedford Borough Council.

The Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014) re-issued 2015 was developed in partnership with the Fostering Network, the joint forum of independent fostering providers and the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, in order to explain and clarify the steps to be followed when a foster carer wishes to transfer between one fostering provider and another. This policy follows good practice identified in it.

### Policy Aims

- To ensure continuity and best quality of care for Bedford’s children in foster home during any transfer of foster carers between fostering providers;
- To minimise the length of time taken in the transfer process;
- To provide an outline for the negotiation of the financial implications of the transfer between providers;
- To ensure that foster carers are not under pressure into changing their fostering provider.

### Policy Principles

- To recognise the welfare of any child in the foster home is paramount;
- Foster carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering providers;
- All fostering providers should be committed to increasing the overall pool of foster carers by the active recruitment of people new to fostering.

### Procedure

#### Initial Enquiry and Visit

- The applicant/s express their interest to Bedford Borough Council.
- Initial enquiry to take place.
- Allocated for initial home visit if the initial enquiry is positive.

- Initial home visits to the applicant/s should be used to gather relevant information.
- The protocol should be explained clearly so that the applicant is fully aware of what to expect and the steps they should take.
- The Supervising Social Worker to obtain the current allowances/fees the foster carer/s are receiving from their current provider.

### **Progressing Process of Transfer**

If after the initial visit/s the applicant/s wishes to proceed and wish to progress the transfer to the Bedford Borough Council; the following steps should be taken:

- The assessing social worker should seek to obtain an agreement from the Team Manager and Head of Service in relation to the fees which will be paid should all parties wish to progress the transfer;
- The foster carer must write to their current agency to advise them of their intention to transfer to another agency, and give their consent for Bedford Borough Council to view their files;
- Foster carer completes Registration of interest;
- Bedford Borough Council writes to foster carer's current provider, confirming the intention of the foster carer, and Bedford Borough Council's awareness of this. The letter also requests a Reference and access to files. If there is/are child/ren in placement, Bedford Borough Council will also advise the current authority that it is their responsibility to notify the placing authority, where other than Bedford Borough Council.
- It is good practice for the assessing social worker to contact the current provider directly at this stage in order to seek acknowledgement that they have received the letter and are aware of Bedford Borough Council's intentions to proceed. This contact also provides an opportunity to set date for the Protocol Meeting (if child/ren in placement);
- The assessing social worker should now progress further checks and references as detailed in the declaration of compliance;
- The assessing social worker to obtain management approval to progress the assessment, and confirmation from Head of Service about level of fees.
- The assessing social worker should inform the Independent Reviewing Officer of any Bedford Borough Council children placed about impending changes.
- The assessing social worker to inform the Placements team of the enquiry, and intention to progress the application, where child/ren are in placement.

### **Sharing of Information**

When a foster carer seeks to move to a new provider, the new provider seeks information from the previous provider about the foster carer, and the previous provider complies with such a request within one month of receipt of the written request. (NMS 26.9).

In the interest of safeguarding the welfare of children in placement, the onus will be on the current provider to prepare a comprehensive, accurate reference and on the recruiting provider to undertake a comprehensive re-assessment.

## Get Involved

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As you embark on your role as a foster carer, you will find that with time, you develop a skill set and knowledge base, which you share with other foster carers who may be going through a challenging time, and newly approved foster carers. Therefore, you may find that you wish to become more involved in the recruitment, training, and support of foster carers. Hence, we have various ways that we encourage you to get involved in fostering, as you evolve your role as a foster carer.

### Refer a Friend ( £500 )

The Fostering Service always has a need for foster carers, who are willing to be trained and skilled in how to care for some of our children and young people. We recognise that you as our foster carer, are one of most powerful and valuable asset in how we recruit future foster carers. Therefore, we offer a referral incentive when you refer a friend or family member to fostering. Once approved, we offer a monetary incentive to say 'thank you' for helping us recruit new carers to care for our children. Please contact your Supervising social worker or Recruitment Manager for details on how you can apply for this. We welcome any informal chats with any person that is considering becoming a foster carer.

### Buddying / Mentoring

We encourage a buddying and mentoring scheme in Bedford Borough Council as we recognise that fostering can be emotionally challenging; we want you to draw from support from your Supervising social worker, and other experienced foster carers. We recognise that these connections happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers attending meetings such as support groups or training courses. Further, your Supervising social workers can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their new fostering career.

### Training

Bedford Borough Council offers many training courses to foster carers, support groups and activities which involve foster carers. We have found that foster carers also enjoy learning from other experienced foster carers who share their experience and knowledge of fostering. We encourage you to come forward and join in, in various activities that the fostering service offer. Please speak to your Supervising social worker on how to get involved in this.

### Raising Awareness of Fostering and Become a Fostering Ambassador

We encourage our Foster Carers to become Fostering Ambassadors for Bedford Borough Council. Fostering Ambassadors raise awareness of the essential nurturing role that foster carers do in adding protection, care and the opportunity for success to a child's life.

If you would like to get involved and become a Fostering Ambassador, please contact your Supervising social worker or a member of the Fostering Team.

## Meet the Team

Here at Bedford Borough Council, we pride ourselves in having a committed workforce. We also work to ensure that we are approachable, professional and accountable to our children and families.

## Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process

The Council aims to provide a high standard of service to the children we look after, foster carers and applicants. The Council welcomes your views and comments about the services provided. Obtaining such views will help us to know what we are doing well and what we need to improve on. We recognise that there will be times when you feel that you wish to raise a complaint.

Foster carers and children have the right to make a complaint and we encourage you to speak to your Supervising social worker, as the first point of addressing your complaint. We welcome formal complaints as well through the Council's formal complaints procedure, Foster carers are able to make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the fostering service, whether it is provided directly by an authority or by a contracted authority or agency.

## The Complaints Process

There are 3 stages to our complaints procedure and we will aim to acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days.

### Stage 1- Local resolution

The Manager of the service complained about will provide a written response within 10 working days or up to 20 working days if complex.

If you are unhappy with the response at Stage 1 you can request Stage 2.

### Stage 2 – Investigation

An investigator will be appointed and will aim to provide a report within 25 working days but it can take up to 65 working days if the case is complex. You will then receive a response from a more senior manager based on the findings in this report. If you are unhappy with the response you can request Stage 3.

### Stage 3 – Independent review

An independent review panel will look at how your complaint has been handled. You will be invited to attend. Following the panel's findings the Director will provide you with a written response within 15 working days.

### Meeting with the service

You may prefer to meet with a manager from the service to resolve your complaint. Customer Relations can support a meeting or provide a mediation service upon your request.

### Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

If you have been through all stages of our complaints procedure and are still unhappy, you can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to review your complaint.

**The Ombudsman investigates complaints independently - it does not take sides.  
It is a free service.**

The Ombudsman expects you to have given us chance to deal with your complaint, before you contact them. If you have not heard from us within a reasonable time, it may decide to look into your complaint anyway. This is usually up to 12 weeks but can be longer for social care complaints that follow a statutory process.

**About the Ombudsman**

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the final stage for complaints about councils and some other organisations providing local public services. It also investigates complaints about all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) for people who self-fund their care.

**Contact**

Website: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk) 0300 061 0614

'Call back' to 0762 481 1595

## **How to contact us and give feedback**

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- Telephone or write to the service area concerned and speak to the manager.
- Telephone Customer Relations on 01234 228597
- Email Customer Relations at [be.heard@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:be.heard@bedford.gov.uk)
- Text Customer Relations on 07795 686459
- Or visit our website [www.bedford.gov.uk/beheard](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/beheard)

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/complaints-and-feedback>

## Useful Contact Details

<p><b>The Fostering Team</b></p>	<p>Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street Bedford MK42 9AP</p> <p>Tel: 01234 718718</p>
<p><b>Fostering Out of Hours</b></p>	<p>Tel: 07837129968</p>
<p><b>Emergency Duty Team</b></p>	<p>Tel: 03003008123</p>
<p><b>Fostering Training Programme</b></p>	<p><a href="mailto:Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk">Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Independent Advocacy (Barnados)</b></p> <p><b>Independent Review Mechanism</b></p> <p><b>Agency Decision Maker</b></p>	<p><a href="mailto:barnadosyoungpeople@barnados.org.uk">barnadosyoungpeople@barnados.org.uk</a></p> <p>Text: 07763580336</p> <p>Tel: 08009177947</p> <p>Independent Review Mechanism</p> <p>Regent Business Hub 4, Pavilion Business Park Royds Hall Road Wortley Leeds LS12 6AJ United Kingdom</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:irm@irm.org.uk">irm@irm.org.uk</a></p> <p>Telephone: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate) or 0113 2022080</p> <p>The Agency Decision Maker is not a member of the fostering panel. The Agency Decision Maker is required to take into account the panel's recommendation on a foster carers suitability to foster, and must see the final minutes before proceeding to make a decision. The Agency Decision Maker can choose to make a different decision to that recommended by the fostering panel. A clear rationale for so doing must be recorded by the Agency Decision Maker of why they have come to the decision that they have made.</p>



<b>Information about the Fostering Service can be accessed via:</b>	Fostering Information Line: 01234 718718
<b>Fostering Network</b>	87 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1 8HA Telephone: <a href="tel:02076206400">020 7620 6400</a>
<b>Bedfordshire Foster Care Association</b>	<a href="mailto:ask@bedsfostercarers.co.uk">ask@bedsfostercarers.co.uk</a>
<b>Runaway Helpline</b>  <b>Free, 24/7 confidential support</b>  <b>Runaway Helpline is here if a young person is thinking about running away, if they have already run away, or if they have been away and come back.</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:116000@runawayhelpline.org.uk">116000@runawayhelpline.org.uk</a>  Tel or Text: 116 000
<b>Kids Who Share</b>	Email: <a href="mailto:voice@bedford.gov.uk">voice@bedford.gov.uk</a>  Tel: 01234 718440
<b>Bedford Borough Council Customer Relations Team (Be Heard)</b>	Telephone Customer Relations: 01234 228597 Email Customer Relations: <a href="mailto:be.heard@bedford.gov.uk">be.heard@bedford.gov.uk</a> Text Customer Relations: 07795 686459  Or visit our website <a href="http://www.bedford.gov.uk/beheard">www.bedford.gov.uk/beheard</a>
<b>Local Government Ombudsman</b>	<a href="http://www.lgo.org.uk">www.lgo.org.uk</a> 0300 061 0614  Text 'Call back' to 0762 481 1595
<b>National Asthma Campaign</b>	<a href="http://www.asthma.org.uk">www.asthma.org.uk</a>
<b>Ofsted</b>	<a href="http://www.ofsted.gov.uk">www.ofsted.gov.uk</a>
<b>Rape Crisis</b>	<a href="http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk">www.rapecrisis.org.uk</a>
<b>Royal National Institute for the Blind</b>	<a href="http://www.rnib.org.uk">www.rnib.org.uk</a>
<b>The Children's Society</b>	<a href="http://www.childrensociety.org.uk">www.childrensociety.org.uk</a>
<b>The Challenging Behaviour Foundation</b>	<a href="http://www.thecbf.org.uk">www.thecbf.org.uk</a>
<b>The Children's Commissioner for England</b>	<a href="http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk">www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk</a>
<b>Voice</b>	<a href="http://www.coramvoice.org.uk">www.coramvoice.org.uk</a>
<b>YoungMinds</b>	<a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a>

<b>Beacon House</b>	<p><a href="https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources">https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources</a></p> <p>Beacon House is passionate about developing freely available resources so that knowledge about the repair of trauma and adversity is in the hands of those who need it. The resources can be used at home or shared with other settings to support the children in your care. There is helpful information for schools. The site includes videos as well as practical activities and articles.</p>
<b>NSPCC</b>	<p><a href="https://www.nspcc.org.uk">https://www.nspcc.org.uk</a></p> <p>This is a brilliant website that provides information about current research, knowledge and legislation on keeping children safe. It also provides support on actions to take.</p>
<b>National Association of Therapeutic Parenting</b>	<p><a href="https://www.naotp.com/">https://www.naotp.com/</a></p> <p>This website does require a membership, which is £45 per year. As a member you will have access to all resources including the opportunity to attend a face to face Listening Circle (or virtual group), access to the NAO TP helpline, closed Members' Facebook Group, downloadable letters and information, and discounts on training. They offer online workshops as well. The membership covers up to two adults per household.</p>
<b>NSPCC</b>	<p><a href="https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/">https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/</a></p> <p>The NSPCC is an amazing website and has access to lots of different information. The link above takes you to their 'keeping children safe' page and from here you can access information about online safety, sex and relationships, and support from parents among other areas. There is also the underwear rule in 'support for parents' and Pantosaurus which is always worth watching and being familiar with.</p>
<b>TED talks</b>	<p><a href="https://www.ted.com/talks">https://www.ted.com/talks</a></p> <p>TED is a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. They believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world. There are 1000's of videos in all different kinds of subjects, for example, shame, attachment, childhood trauma, loss and grief and many more.</p>

<b>Kooth</b>	<p><a href="http://www.kooth.com">www.kooth.com</a></p> <p>This is an online service that is available to support the wellbeing and resilience of young people aged 11-20. Kooth is a web based confidential support service available to young people. It provides a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people. Kooth offers young people the opportunity to have a text-based conversation with a qualified counsellor. Counsellors are available from 12noon to 10pm on weekdays and 6pm to 10 pm at weekends, every day of the year on a drop-in basis. Young people can access regular booked online counselling sessions as needed. Outside counselling hours' young people can message our team and get support by the next day</p>
<b>Brook Traffic Light Tool</b>	<p><a href="https://www.brook.org.uk/training/wider-professional-training/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool/">https://www.brook.org.uk/training/wider-professional-training/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool/</a></p> <p>This is an interesting and useful tool that helps to identify, understand and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours in young people. The tool is split into different age categories and then green, amber or red behaviours. There are scenarios to look at, information about what the behaviour will look like, and what you can do.</p>
<b>Nuffield Family Justice Observatory re digital contact</b>	<p><a href="https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/digital-contact-childrens-wellbeing">https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/digital-contact-childrens-wellbeing</a></p> <p>This is an interesting evidence review which examines what is known about the implications of digital contact on the well-being of children who have been separated from their birth relatives. The review was commissioned following the implementation of social distancing measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the UK in March 2020.</p>

## Useful Acronyms/Terminology

<b>ADM</b>	Agency Decision Maker
<b>BBC</b>	Bedford Borough Council
<b>FC</b>	Foster Carer
<b>CLA</b>	Child looked after Review
<b>CLA Review</b>	CLA Review
<b>SSW</b>	Supervising social worker
<b>SW</b>	Social Worker
<b>CSW</b>	Child Social Worker
<b>SGO</b>	Special Guardianship Order
<b>PEP</b>	Personal Education Plan
<b>PDP</b>	Personal Development Plan
<b>ICO</b>	Interim Care Order of the Children's Act 1989
<b>CIN</b>	Child in Need, Children in Need
<b>CSE</b>	Child Sexual Exploitation
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>NMS</b>	National Minimum Standards for fostering
<b>IRM</b>	Independent Review Mechanism
<b>Ofsted</b>	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is a non- ministerial department of the UK government reporting to the Parliament. They monitor and inspect the service.
<b>PCT</b>	Primary Care Trust
<b>LADO</b>	Local Authority Designated Officer
<b>TSD</b>	Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers
<b>PPM</b>	Placement Planning Meeting
<b>BFCA</b>	Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association ( <a href="http://www.bedsfostercarers.co.uk">www.bedsfostercarers.co.uk</a> )

## Reading List

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As a team, at Bedford Borough Council, we have put together a list of books that we think are useful, helpful and informative to the fostering task. All of the books look at different areas that are relevant to traumatised children and children living with difficult life experiences. Please look the books up to read more about them and speak to your supervising social worker about whether they would be helpful for you.....although we think they are all helpful!

**Title: Attachment, Trauma and Resilience**

**Author: Kate and Brian Cairns**

**Edition: 2016**

In this remarkable and inspirational book, Kate and Brian draw upon the wealth of their personal and professional experience to offer an insight into the realities of family life with children who have lived through overwhelming stress. Vividly described scenarios show how the family responded to children displaying powerful feelings and difficult behaviours following their experiences of attachment difficulties, loss, abuse and trauma.

**Title: A Child's Journey Through Placement**

**Author: Vera Fahlberg**

**Edition: 2008**

Children who are cared for in an out of home placement are in need of support and stability. This classic text offers information and advice for professionals and carers on how to help these children, who will often have attachment difficulties. Fahlberg shares her experience and expertise, outlining the significance of attachment and separation, the developmental stages specific to adoptive children and providing guidance on minimising the trauma of moves. The book also features practical advice on case planning, managing behaviour and direct work with children, and throughout are case studies and exercises which provide opportunities for further learning.

**Title: Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell: Positive and Pitfalls**

**Author: Sarah Naish**

**Edition: 2016**

A concise, clear overview of Therapeutic Parenting with integrated links to short inspirational, often humorous videos, demonstrating practical applications of therapeutic parenting techniques. Suitable for all carers, parents and supporting professionals working with children who have suffered early life trauma. Sarah Naish uses her first hand experience to clearly explain the differences between 'standard' parenting and 'therapeutic' parenting, with case studies and examples of good therapeutic parenting strategies, along with practical applications. Written with the busy parent and supporting professional in mind, this short book provides answers for all those caring for children with attachment difficulties, explaining why we need to parent our children differently, common additional challenges faced by Therapeutic Parents, and the best way to resolve them.

**Title: The Parenting Puzzle: Your Guide to Transforming Family Life****Author: Candida Hunt****Edition: 2003**

This non-prescriptive guide to parenting focuses as much on the emotional wellbeing of the parent as on the needs of the child. The Parenting Puzzle is based on the Nurturing Programme, a well-established and highly respected 10-week course that encourages parents and carers to enjoy bringing up children and get the best out of family life. It helps us understand how emotions influence our actions, and offers many positive, practical ways of guiding children so they learn to handle both their feelings and their behaviour. It suggests ways of helping us feel good - boosting self-esteem in ourselves and in our children.

**Title: The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting****Author: Sarah Naish****Edition: 2018**

Therapeutic parenting is a deeply nurturing parenting style, and is especially effective for children with attachment difficulties, or who experienced childhood trauma. This book provides everything you need to know in order to be able to effectively therapeutically parent. Providing a model of intervention, The A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting gives parents or caregivers an easy to follow process to use when responding to issues with their children. The A-Z covers 60 common problems carers face, from acting aggressively to difficulties with sleep, with advice on what might trigger these issues, and how to respond. Easy to navigate and written in a straightforward style, this book is a 'must have' for all therapeutic parents.

**Title: The Simple Guide to Understanding Shame in Children****Author: Betsy de Thierry****Edition: 2018**

What is shame? How does it affect children? How can adults help? The perfect starting point for any adult or carer working with children who have experienced shame, this guide provides straightforward answers and explanations to both common and complex questions. At a time when children are more likely than ever to experience shame, the accessible advice in this book helps adults to boost children's self-esteem. Betsy de Thierry navigates the need to understand its impact and the reasons behind it, as well as how to reduce its hold on self-confidence. Reassuring advice will also help revitalize adults' abilities to face the challenges of supporting children affected by shame. It will teach them how to restore self-esteem.

**Title: The Great Behaviour Breakdown****Author: Brian Post****Edition: 2009**

Lying, stealing, defiance, incessant chatter...presented here are 27 of the most serious, problematic and challenging behaviours that parents face and step-by-step guidance from America's foremost child behaviour expert on how to deal with them. This book will teach you about your own stress reactions, and how you can respond more effectively to your children from your own inner strength with compassionate understanding rather than reacting out of your fear.

The Reading List is regularly reviewed. If you would like to contribute to the programme, such as a useful website, book or article, then please contact the Fostering Training Inbox [Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Fostering.Training@bedford.gov.uk).



# Accident /Incident Form

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## 1. Details of child/young person affected

First name: ..... Surname: ..... M  F  Age: .....

Address: .....

Carer's name: .....

## 2. Details of where and when accident/incident occurred

Name of premises: .....

Address & postcode: .....

Location on the premises: (e.g. kitchen, garden etc)

Date: ..... Time: .....

## 3. Details of injury and treatment received (where applicable)

Description of injury sustained: .....

Treatment (tick all that apply):

Received First Aid  Visited doctor  Went to hospital

Detained in hospital 0 (for ..... hrs / ..... days)

## 4. Details of witness(es) (where applicable)

Name(s): .....

Address(es): .....

Phone number(s): .....

## 5. STATE PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED (using Body Map to show injuries/bruises if needed) (continue on a separate sheet if required)

Child Care SW/Fostering Social Worker notified Yes  No  Date: .....

Carer: .....

Signed: ..... Print name: ..... Date: .....

Injured/affected person (where applicable): .....

I confirm that the above information is correct: .....

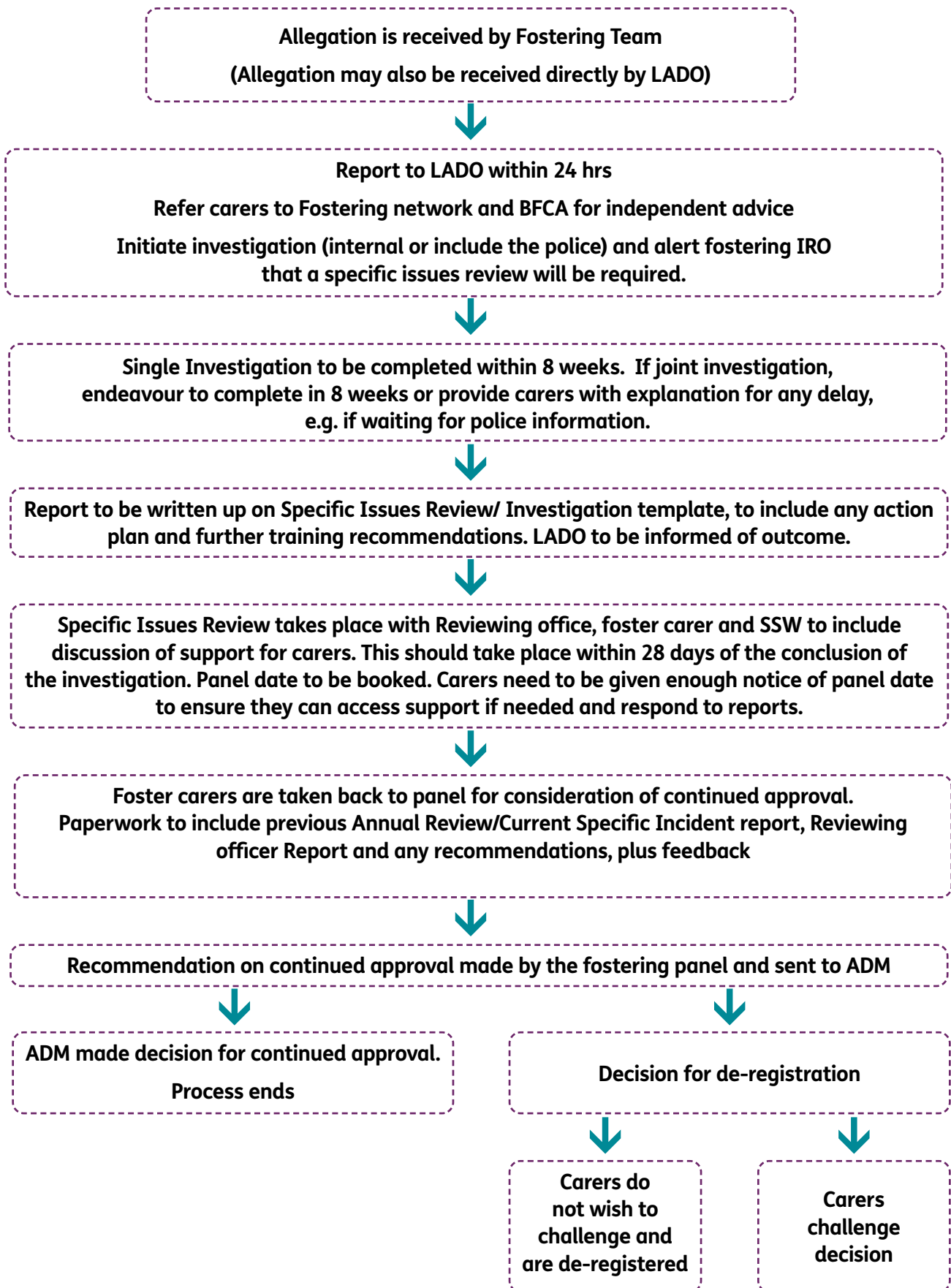




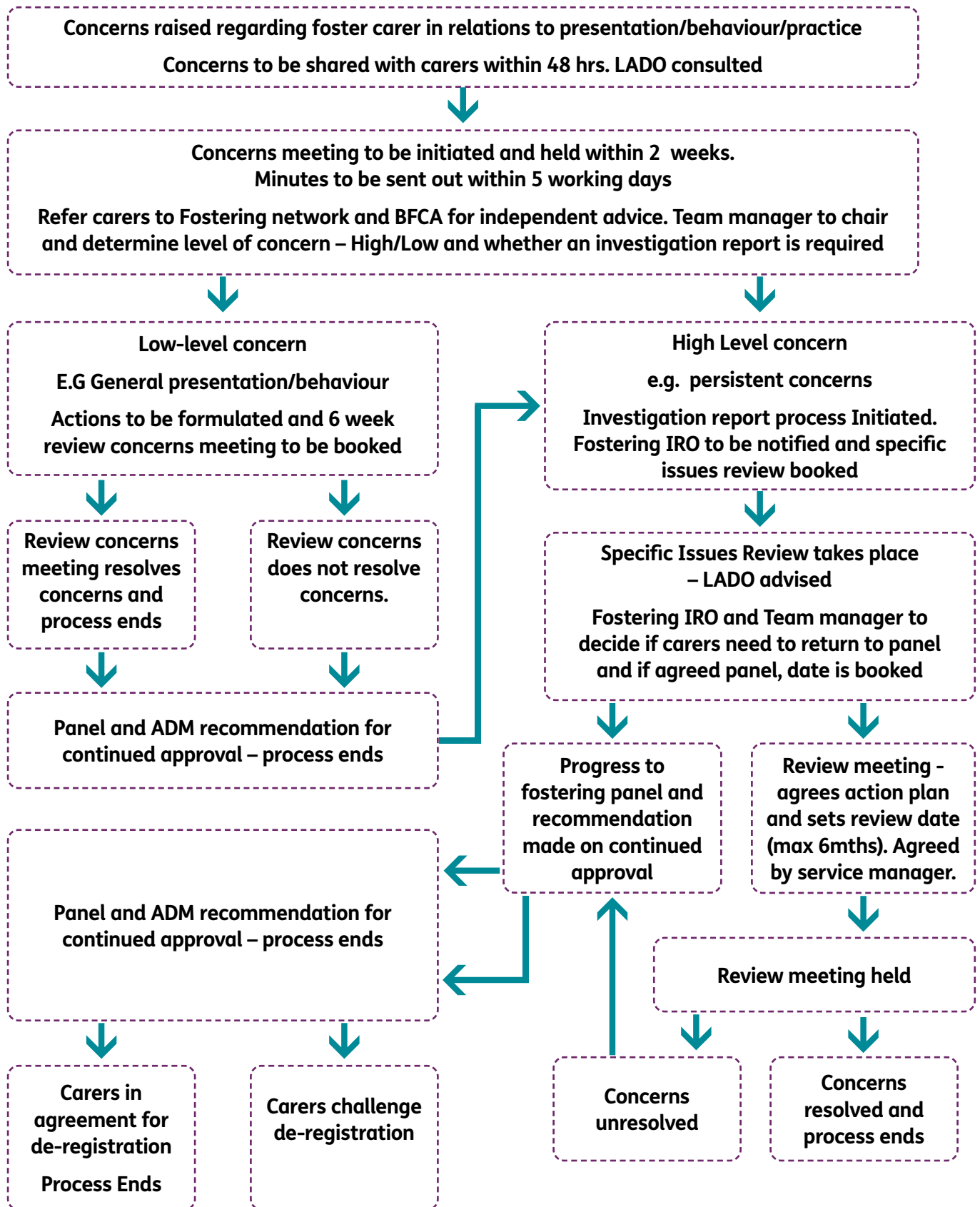
**Individual Family Policy:  
Strategies for Safer Caring Form**

Foster Carers Name(s):			
		Homes Rules:	
The names you use			
Affection			
In the bathroom			
The way you dress			
Playing			
Foster Carer's bedrooms			
Children's bedrooms			
Bedtime			
When you go out			
Travelling by car			
Taking photos and videos			
Education about sex and sexuality			
What safer caring strategies do you use when on holiday? Please ensure this is explored thoroughly – should we encourage a temporary safer caring from for holidays?			
Date of Policy:		Date to review Policy:	
Carers Signatures:		Social Worker Signature:	
Date:		Date:	

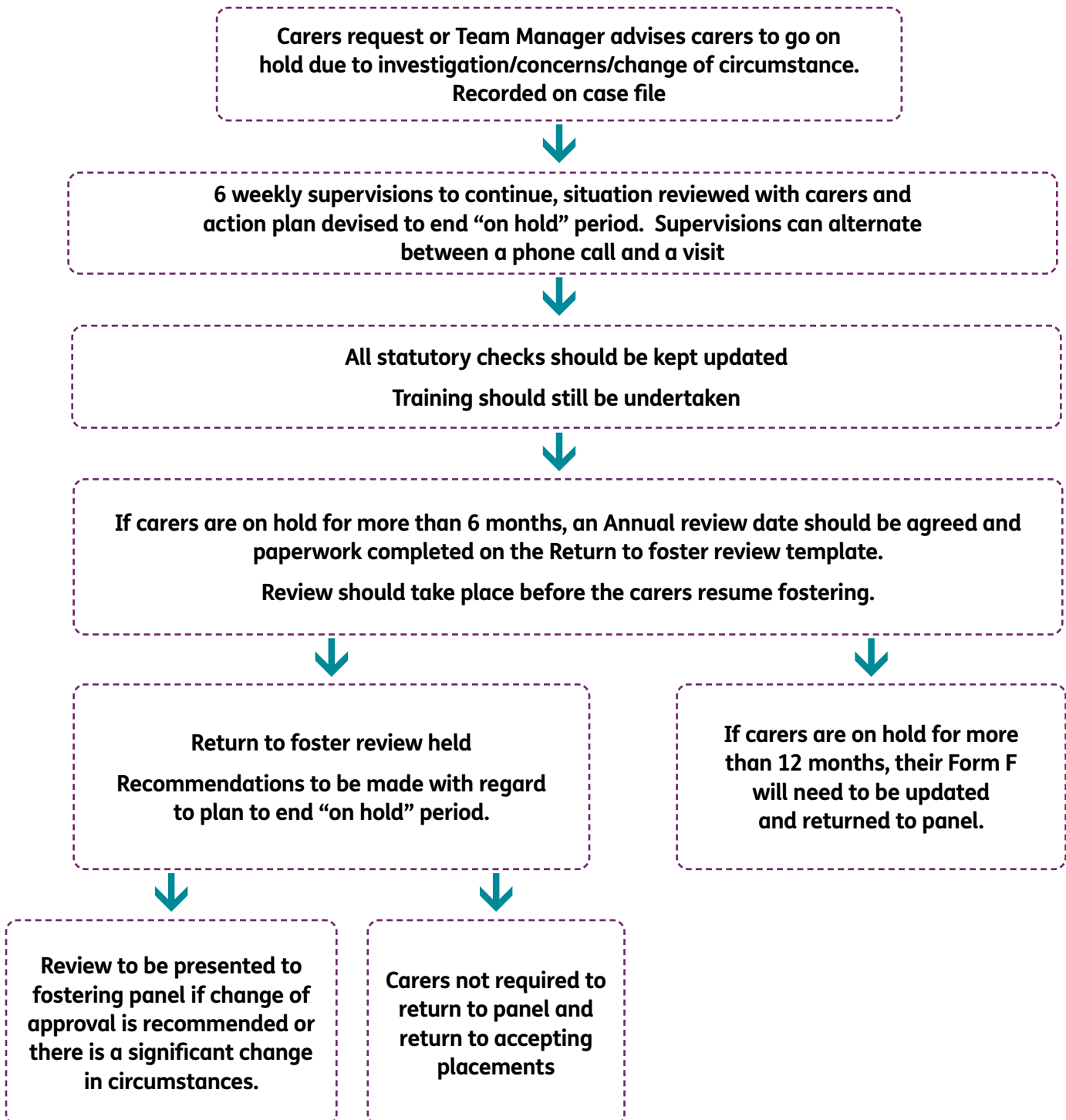
## Flow chart for Process following an Allegation



## Flow Chart for Standards of Care



## Flow Chart for Foster Carers on Hold



## Further Legislation relevant to fostering

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### 4. National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011

#### **Child Focused Standards**

STANDARD 1 - The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

STANDARD 2 - Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care

STANDARD 3 - Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

STANDARD 4 - Safeguarding Children

STANDARD 5 - Children Missing from Care

STANDARD 6 - Promoting good health and wellbeing

STANDARD 7 - Leisure activities

STANDARD 8 - Promoting educational attainment

STANDARD 9 - Promoting and supporting contact

STANDARD 10 - Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child

STANDARD 11 - Preparation for a placement

STANDARD 12 - Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and 16+ Supporting Futures

#### **Standards of the Fostering Service**

STANDARD 13 - Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of children looked after

STANDARD 14 - Fostering panels and the fostering service's decision-maker

STANDARD 15 - Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed needs

STANDARD 16 - Statement of purpose and children's guide

STANDARD 17 - Fitness to provide or manage the administration of a fostering service

STANDARD 18 - Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity

STANDARD 19 - Suitability to work with children

STANDARD 20 - Learning and development of foster carers

STANDARD 21 - Supervision and support of foster carers

STANDARD 22 - Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

STANDARD 23 - Learning, development and qualifications of staff

STANDARD 24 - Staff support and supervision

STANDARD 25 - Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

STANDARD 26 - Records

STANDARD 27 - Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

STANDARD 28 - Payment to carers

STANDARD 29 - Notification of Significant Events

STANDARD 30 - Family and friends as foster carers

STANDARD 31 - Placement Plan and Review

