

Fostering

Wiltshire County Council Department for Children & Education

Code of Practice for Private Foster Carers

The Code of Practice sets out the standards that carers are generally expected to maintain. In some cases, where indicated, the safety standards relate to younger children only.

The Children Act 1989 places emphasis throughout on the Welfare of the Child as a main guiding principle. Carers, natural parents and the Local Authority should see themselves as operating as a partnership to advise, assist and befriend the child and to act in the child's best interests. There may be occasions when the adults disagree about a course of action- the Welfare Principle should offer guidance.

1. QUALITY OF CARE

All children must be cared for with equal concern, and with due regard shown to their religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background.

Carers are expected to take into account the need for a child to retain his/her religious persuasion, racial and cultural identity. The Local Authority is expected to advise on this. It would be inappropriate for example to attempt to change a child's religion.

Settling in

Coming to live with a new carer requires the child to come to terms with new surroundings, new routines, new people and a new set of expectations. Certain children are likely to find this more difficult than others; those undergoing some major stress or who have had unhappy separation experiences in the past; first-born children unused to sharing their carer with other children: children in the 7- 18 month age range whose attachments to their parents are going through a sensitive formative stage. All children are helped by a gentle introduction and carers should allow (and should expect) the child's parent or other principal carer to spend some time with the child in the home, while the child adjusts

Play

The carer should be able to demonstrate that she/he has the play materials and equipment for a range of different types of activity for each of the age groups for which she/he cares. Play materials and equipment should be safe for the youngest children having access to them (for example, children under three years should not have access to toys with small pieces). They should be appropriate for the needs of the individual children cared for (including disabled children) and reflect the variations in religion, race, culture and language that exist in our society.

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Punishment

Carers should not use any physical punishment or practices that humiliate or frighten children, or threats of such punishments or practices. If you experience difficulties with the child's behaviour, contact the child's social worker or your local children and families team who will have access to advice and support.

School

The carer has a responsibility to ensure that the child receives education appropriate to their age and aptitude (including special education where necessary) The carer must consult with the parent when making any arrangements.

Links with Parents

Regardless of the important attachments that build up between carer and child, the carer shares the child and looks after him/her "in trust" for the child's own parents, not in total substitution for them. Careful planning with parents, to consider the individual child's needs and wants and to ensure continuing contact between child and parent, will be crucial for the child's welfare and happiness.

To avoid difficulties and misunderstandings, carers are advised to enter into written agreements with parents. Contact the department if you would like help with this.

Training

Caring for other peoples' children requires special skills, in particular learning to share the child with his/her parents. The department will be offering you training to help support you in this task. There will be more specialised training available if you are caring for a child with particular needs, such as physical or behavioural difficulties.

2 SUITABILITY OF PREMISES

The Local Authority is required by law to inspect the premises where a privately fostered child is being or, is proposed to be, accommodated and to satisfy itself about the suitability of the accommodation.

When deciding the suitability of the accommodation the following points will be considered, depending on the individual child's age and stage of development:-

Space

There should be sufficient usable play space for the children being cared for (childminding minimum standards are 2.5 square metres for each child over 3 years and 3 square metres for each child under 3 years)

Sleeping arrangements

All children must have their own bed or cot. Children over 2 years should not share a bedroom with teenagers or adults. Children over the age of 7

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years of different sexes should not generally share bedrooms. The department will visit to inspect the sleeping arrangements.

Safety

Children should be protected from all hazards and in ensuring a safe environment for younger children, the following matters will be taken into account when your home is being assessed.

Dangerous substances or dangerous items, must always be inaccessible to the children.

Electrical appliances must be safely maintained.

A minimum of two **smoke detectors** should be situated in appropriate positions screwed to the ceiling. They must be fully operational whilst the privately fostered child is present.

A fire blanket, minimum size 1m x 1m, must be available. This should be fitted in the kitchen at an easily accessible point away from the cooker area.

A **secured nursery fireguard** must be in place for all used fires

Mobile gas or paraffin heaters should not be used and should not be on the premises whilst privately fostered children are present.

Young privately fostered children should not have unsupervised access to the **kitchen** area. Care should be taken while cooking to ensure that panhandles do not overhang the edge of the cooker and kettle flexes are not accessible.

An **appropriate harness** should secure privately fostered children that use high chairs.

Stair gates must be used appropriately to ensure safety, and banisters must exist and be safe if stairways are to be used by privately fostered children.

A basic first aid kit must be kept and updated regularly.

Basic standards of **hygiene** must be maintained.

All **external areas** to which privately fostered children have access should be properly maintained, clean and free from hazards.

Outside play areas should be securely enclosed so that minded children cannot leave the premises unsupervised. Gates must be fitted with childproof locks.

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Animals

Any animals kept in the private foster carers home must be healthy, regularly wormed and appropriately cared for. All animals are potentially dangerous to children and it is the responsibility of the private foster carer to ensure that adequate measures are taken to safeguard the children. Private foster carers who keep animals must inform parents of this at an early stage in negotiations.

Car Safety

All privately fostered children travelling in cars must be protected by BSI Approved car restraints which are appropriate for the child's age range. This will restrict the number of children carried to the number of restraints available.

Private Foster Carers should have the permission of the children's parents/guardian and must inform their Motor Insurance Company if they intend to carry privately fostered children in their cars.

Accidents and Illnesses

Children must be registered with a doctor. A record of all accidents and illnesses should be kept. Accident reports on children should include: name of child, date, time, place, adults present, brief description of accident, and action taken. Details of illnesses should include whether the doctor was called or if the child was admitted to hospital. Records should confirm that the child's parent has been informed.

Dangerous Activities

Carers should obtain the permission of parents, preferably in writing, before allowing children to be involved in potentially dangerous sports and activities.

3. HEALTH & HYGIENE

Diet

A balanced diet should be provided for the children's health and growth. Account should be taken of the children's likes and dislikes. Provision must be made for children with special dietary needs whether on health or cultural grounds. Carers should be alert to reactions to certain sorts of foods and should monitor these.

Health Care

There is increasing evidence that children can be put at risk from cigarette smoke. Carers should not smoke when caring for children.

If more than one child in your care is suffering from vomiting and diarrhoea, the advice of a doctor or health visitor should be sought straight away.

Any child suffering an open wound in the garden or park may need to have an injection against tetanus unless already protected.

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Carers should be aware that children arriving from overseas may be incubating a tropical disease. Any concerns should be discussed with your doctor, who should be informed of the date of entry of the child into the country.

Medical Consent

If a child requires medical treatment, the consent of parents will be necessary and carers are advised to obtain a general medical consent from the parents. If you have to take a child to the surgery or a hospital in an emergency, you should inform the doctor in charge that you are NOT in a position to sign consent to medical treatment. The doctor will then act as he thinks best for the child and may arrange to contact the parents if you have been unable to do so already yourself. Where the child is admitted to hospital, parents must be informed as soon as possible. If you are unable to contact the parents within 24 hours of admission, you must inform the department.

4. RECORDS

You are required to keep an individual record in respect of each child in your care, and these records should contain:-

- a) The name, sex, date and place of birth, religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background of the child;
- b) The name and address and contact number of any parent of the child and any other person who has parental responsibility for the child.
- c) The date on which the arrangement actually began and is intended to end
- d) The name and address of the previous and current doctor and health visitor
- e) An up to date medical history of the child including immunisations, allergies, particular medical conditions, any special needs or disabilities and details of medication.
- f) A file of school reports
- g) Details of contact arrangements between child and parents
- h) Financial records of monies received for the upkeep of the child
- i) Details of contact with social workers.
- j) A photograph album of significant people/events in a child's life
- k) A record of any accident occurring whilst the child is in your care.

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5. FEES

Fees are a matter for you to arrange directly with the parents of the child. You may like to seek advice as to whether you may be entitled to claim benefits for the child from your local benefits office.

6. CHILD ABUSE

Children who are victims of child abuse need immediate help and protection. If you suspect that a child in your care has been neglected or physically, emotionally or sexually abused, you should **immediately** consult with the duty officer at your local Children & Families office (these are listed on **Guidance Leaflet for Private Foster Carers**).