

Confidentiality

Foster carers are entrusted with personal and confidential information about a child and their family in order to help them to care for the child(ren) in placement. As the placement progresses foster carers will receive minutes of meetings children's reviews, reports etc, and will have a modular file for each child in which to record significant issues in the placement.

Foster carers will be working with other professionals also involved with the child, eg teachers, health professionals, and care needs to be taken in how and when information is shared.

Principles of the policy

- Foster carers need full information about a child's family background and current needs, initially to enable them to make a decision about whether or not they can meet their needs and accept the placement, and later to help them meet the child's ongoing needs as the placement progresses.
- Foster carers need to consider carefully what information their immediate family need to have about the child to ensure they and the child remain safe.
- Foster children and their families have the right to expect that information about them is kept secure and confidential.
- Information should not be shared other than on a 'need to know' basis.

Practice

- All information about the child should be kept in a secure, locked place within the foster home.
- Carers must maintain a separate record for each child placed. Information about one child should not be recorded in another child's record.
- All Minutes of meetings, reviews, any recordings made by the foster carer etc and the child's modular file must be returned to the child's Social Worker at the end of the placement.
- Carers should only discuss information about a child in placement with those who 'need to know' eg SW; FPSW; school teacher; DR, other professionals working with the child. If in doubt foster carers should seek advice from the child's SW or FPSW before sharing any information.
- Carers will find that their friends and family are likely to ask questions about a child who is placed with them. Carers need to be clear that no information can be shared with them about the child's background or circumstances.
- Foster carers need to ensure that when they are discussing a child's situation with those who need to know, that this is done in a safe, secure environment where the conversation cannot be overheard.
- Any record or reports written by the foster carer should be sent securely or handed over in person. Reports or records should not be sent by email unless through a secure system (foster e-comms.).

- Records made by foster carers about children in placement can be requested by the Court in court proceedings. Records must therefore be factual and not the carer's opinion.
- Children have a right to have access to their records as part of Access to Records Policy. Foster carers need to bear this in mind when writing records to ensure they are factual and not the carer's opinion.
- All written records made by foster carers about children in placement belong to the Department and should be returned to the child's sw when the placement ends.
- Foster carers must not share any information about or place any photographs of any children in placement, or engage in any discussion about children placed with them on social network sites (see foster carers and IT policy for more information)
- Children may need help and support in what explanation to give their friends, members of the foster carers family etc about why they are living with foster carers rather than their own family. Foster carers and the child's SW should support the child with this.
- On occasions children may ask to tell foster carers something if they promise not to tell anyone else. Foster carers can never agree to this as the information may be a child protection issue, or significant for Care proceedings. It is important that children feel supported and listened to, but know that anything they share with a foster carer may need to be reported to their Social worker. A record must be made of any such conversations and the information passed on immediately to their FPSW and the child's Social worker. (see managing a disclosure and safeguarding procedures)
- Copies of foster carers supervision notes are for them to keep as a record of their practice, and need to be stored in a secure, locked place (e-comms)
- Following approval guidelines regarding recording and reporting will be covered at the handover meeting with the supervising social worker, and training is available for all foster carers to update this (see foster carers training and development pathway schedule)