Assessment of New Partners, Family Members, within Fostering Households

Foster Carer Policies and Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/assessment-of-new-partners-family-members-within-fostering-households/

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Legislation and Guidance

1. **The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011**
   - Regulation 27: Approval of foster parents
   - Regulation 28: Reviews and terminations of approval
   - Schedule 5 (2)(b)(ii)): Changes to household composition
2. **Children Act 1989: fostering services, Volume 4: statutory guidance on fostering services for looked-after children ■ 5.31:**
   "The Regulations refer only to approval of individuals. Where two people will be sharing the care of a child, whether they be a couple or any other partnership, they should be jointly assessed and approved as Foster Carers. Where a single Foster Carer takes a partner, who will be sharing the care of any foster children, they must discuss this with their supervising social worker so that agreement can be reached about the best way to update their assessment and to assess the partner for approval as a Foster Carer within an appropriate timescale."
3. **Disclosure and Barring Service: guidance for children's social care providers and managers**
   - Non-resident partners of Foster Carers:
   "Providers and managers must show that they have an effective policy to monitor Foster Carers' relationships. They should guide Foster Carers on how to manage non-resident partners' access and responsibilities for the children and young people they foster."

Introduction

Positive Aspirations recognises that single Foster Carers may build new partnerships and meaningful relationships.

The agency will make sure that every approved Foster Carer understands their responsibility to tell the Fostering Service before any change to the composition of their household or any other significant change in their circumstances that could affect their fostering—for example, a new relationship, pregnancy, or bereavement.

Some Foster Carers apply to foster as single Foster Carers. Their assessment should explore what might happen if they form a new partnership or develop a significant relationship. Other Foster Carers may experience separation or divorce while fostering.

When being in a relationship becomes "significant"

Significant – "large or important enough to have an effect or to be noticed." – Oxford Dictionary.

This definition is an important starting point because it prompts the Foster Carer to think about how involvement with a partner could influence everyday life as a Foster Carer caring for a child. Reflection on what might noticeably change as the relationship develops should be part of an ongoing conversation between the Foster Carer and the supervising social worker.

Considering Children Act 1989 – Vol 4 – 5.32 (England), Positive Aspirations will take the following into account for every new partnership and significant relationship of an existing Foster Carer:

- **Appropriate timescales –** Timescales are likely to align with the phases of the relationship. The depth of the partner's involvement in the Foster Carer's life, and any wish to join in family activities that could naturally lead to meeting foster children, will shape these timescales.
- **Update the existing Foster Carer assessment –** The assessor may look at the Foster Carer's existing assessment and/or reviews to show their skills in partnership working, honesty, forming meaningful relationships, prioritising children's needs, resilience, and any vulnerabilities stemming from past experiences as a child or adult—all of which will matter in the partner's assessment. The assessor must remember that, although they are evaluating the partner's suitability, the couple are applying to foster together.

- **Assess the partner for approval as a Foster Carer –** The existing Foster Carer remains approved until a new joint assessment is completed and approved.

Initial Stages of a Relationship *(no contact with foster child)*

Foster Carer to inform the supervising social worker that they are beginning a relationship and whether the new partner is expected to visit the foster home regularly. The supervising social worker should explore with the Foster Carer the impact of this new relationship.

Supervising social worker to confirm that an assessment will be needed if and when the relationship progresses, and—if the Foster Carer agrees—to meet the new partner.

There must be consideration of the new partner's likely role in the fostering household and whether they plan to move in or spend substantial time staying over. If the partner will be significantly involved in caring for and supporting children, they will need to be assessed for the fostering role they intend to take. A DBS check must be started at the earliest stage (for this policy, as soon as a partner will visit regularly or stay overnight, they are treated as part of the fostering household for DBS purposes).

Non-resident Partners

This section applies to the partner of an applicant or approved Foster Carer who does not live in the fostering household and is not being assessed as a Foster Carer. It applies during assessment and after approval when a Foster Carer starts a new relationship.

Non-resident partners vary widely, from barely involved in the household to effectively living in the home. A non-resident partner is initially treated as a regular visitor and the DBS requirements in "Initial Stages of a Relationship" apply.

The checks needed beyond this depend on the partner's level of involvement. During assessment, the Assessments Manager and the Form F assessor agree which checks are needed, as part of their judgement about risk for everyone connected to an application going to panel. After approval, the supervising social worker does the same with their manager. Factors to consider include:

- how involved the partner is in the Foster Carer's life and household

- whether they stay overnight
- and whether a foster child, particularly a baby, sleeps in the same bedroom when the partner stays.

Depending on involvement and risk, a non-resident partner may be treated as Enhanced Support, with further checks.

Non-resident partners can also benefit from completing training and therefore this should be discussed with the Foster Carer and the partner, and offered where relevant, so the partner can safeguard themselves and understand the Foster Carer's responsibilities.

Before a New Partner Moves in

Foster Carers must tell their Supervising Social Worker about any intended change in household composition, including changes in personal circumstances or any other event that could affect their capacity to care for a child or the suitability of their household.

A relationship naturally alters the Foster Carer's circumstances, and the supervising social worker must discuss with the Foster Carer the impact on their fostering responsibilities.

Sharing information about personal or household changes is a key part of supervision and relies on openness and transparency between Foster Carers and the supervising social worker. Foster Carers need to understand why this information is required, how it may influence their role, and how it relates to the needs of children in placement.

A sensitive, proportionate discussion is needed to decide whether the supervising social worker should speak with the new partner and whether the foster child should be consulted about their understanding of the situation. The depth of the relationship's impact on the Foster Carer—its duration, status, and intimacy—should guide this decision.

When a Foster Carer plans for their partner to move in, the partner must not do so until a Foster Carer Assessment has been completed and presented to the Agency Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker. All usual statutory checks and references are required. During the assessment the Foster Carer remains approved and responsible for their duties until changes are made by the Fostering Panel. The new joint assessment must explore both the Foster Carer and the partner as a couple and examine their relationship's impact.

If the partner is approved, they will usually be reviewed jointly with the Foster Carer. The first joint review must occur:

• within 6 months if children are already in placement, or
• within 6 months of the first placement, or
• within one year of approval—whichever is sooner.

An annual review will follow every year, or sooner if serious concerns arise.

Procedures for Undertaking a Joint Assessment of an Existing Foster Carer

The partner's assessment report must cover all areas required by fostering regulations—family history, previous relationships, education, employment, personal attributes—and must also focus on the new relationship, considering questions such as:

• how the couple will manage living together and fostering together
• how often the partner will be in the family home and whether they will take part in day-to-day decision-making for children placed
• how their parenting styles and roles will blend or complement
• how differences of approach will be managed
• how the relationship will cope with stress and family life and how supportive the partner will be
• if the partner has children, whether those children will join the household or visit regularly, and the impact of this
• if the partner was previously in a relationship, whether any relevant information arises from an ex-partner reference
• the impact on children in the household as the relationship has grown, and the quality of the relationship between the children and the partner
• how confidentiality will be discussed, agreed, and upheld
• how safer-caring practice in the home will be reviewed, updated, and supported
• how the views and feelings of the child or children cared for will be heard and explored
• how the child will be supported to build their relationship with the Foster Carer's partner and, where applicable, with the partner's children
• whether the partner will support school runs or other regular care or household tasks
• clarity about any limits to the partner's role
• what training the partner is expected to complete—for example, fostering roles and responsibilities,

safeguarding, and safer-caring

• whether a move to another property is planned

A review of the existing Foster Carer must take place before the partner's assessment begins. This review should record the new person's significance, include checks and observations to date, and continue to recommend ongoing approval. Holding the review keeps the existing Foster Carer within the 12-month review cycle.

During this change, the supervising social worker must speak with any children already placed about their feelings, involve them in the process, and make sure they are supported.

The supervising social worker must inform the child's placing local authority about the significant relationship and the planned assessment.

While the joint assessment is under way, the supervising social worker must update the Safe Care Plan to show the partner as a regular visitor. If a DBS certificate is not yet in place, the partner must not be left unsupervised with the child or children. A risk assessment must be completed and remain in place until the fostering panel approves the assessment.

The partner must complete all mandatory training, including safeguarding, within the required timescales.

The supervising social worker should make additional unannounced visits.

The agency aims to update the current Form F assessment and finish it within 6 months. If this is not possible, records must show ongoing progress.

Lodgers *(residents/members of the fostering household) in Foster Homes*

The following guidelines support Foster Carers who are thinking about taking in a lodger, ensuring the safety, stability, and well-being of children in care. These guidelines apply to all approved Foster Carers within our agency and set out the steps, considerations, and requirements when accommodating a lodger. Lodgers will be assessed in the same way as members of the household and will need all necessary checks.

• Foster Carers must tell their supervising social worker if they wish to take in a lodger and must gain written approval from the fostering agency before the lodger moves in. Not seeking approval may

lead to a review of the Foster Carer's approval.

• The proposed lodger must have a DBS check to confirm they pose no risk.

• The proposed lodger must also undergo a Local Authority check for every address in their 10-year address history.

• The agency will carry out a risk assessment to consider the potential impact on the child, including space, privacy, and the child's well-being.

• The needs and best interests of the foster child are the top priority. A lodger's presence must not compromise the child's physical or emotional safety or disrupt their sense of stability.

• **Space and Privacy:** Lodgers are not allowed to share bedrooms with the foster child. The foster child must continue to have suitable personal and communal space within the home.

• The agency will monitor how the lodger's presence affects the fostering arrangement. This may involve extra visits and regular reviews to make sure the lodger does not affect the child's well-being or the Foster Carer's ability to meet their fostering responsibilities.

• Any change in the lodger's status or behaviour must be reported promptly to the supervising social worker.

• Lodgers must not take on caregiving tasks or have unsupervised access to the foster child. Clear boundaries ensure that the Foster Carer remains the primary caregiver.

Non-compliance with this policy may lead to a review of the Foster Carer's approval status and other appropriate actions by the agency.

This policy will be reviewed regularly to make sure it stays relevant and follows fostering regulations and best practice.