Pregnancy Risk Assessment Policy

Foster Carer Policies and Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/pregnancy-risk-assessment-policy/

Risk assessment: when it starts, who owns it, and the 72-hour standard

In one paragraph

The clock starts the moment any member of agency staff becomes aware of a confirmed pregnancy in a fostering household. The supervising social worker (SSW) completes the assessment with the Foster Carer; the Registered Manager (RM) signs it off within 72 hours. It is reviewed at fixed points and whenever something changes, and it leads to adjustments and support, not automatic restriction.

1. Purpose and scope

This policy sets one standard across the group for what happens when a Foster Carer, or another adult in a fostering household, becomes pregnant. It applies to every approved Foster Carer, with or without a child placed, and to the six months after a birth. **It does not cover pregnancy in a child placed, or parent and child placements.**

A pregnancy is a normal life event with practical implications. The assessment exists to work out what the household and the children need from us. Any adjustment must be proportionate, time-limited and recorded with reasons. The Foster Carer’s own decisions about her health sit with her and her midwife or GP.

2. Regulatory basis

No regulation or standard mentions ‘pregnancy’ by name. Our duties come from the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- Schedule 5: Foster Carers must tell the agency without delay about any change in their personal circumstances or who lives in the household.
- Regulation 12: Safeguarding.
- Regulation 17: Support.
- Regulation 28: Reviews of approval whenever the agency considers one necessary.

National Minimum Standards 4.5, 10.6, 15.1 and 21.8, standards on safer caring, health and safety, matching and Foster Carer support also apply.

Children Act 1989 – duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Pregnancy and birth are not notifiable events under Schedule 7, so we do not need to notify Ofsted. However, Ofsted does inspect two things: whether safe care plans are updated for new and emerging risks, including a baby in the home, and whether managers can show their oversight.

Foster Carers are not employees. Even so, we follow the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approach to new and expectant mothers as good practice. We also treat pregnancy as if it were a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

3. When the assessment starts

Start point

The assessment starts, and the 72-hour clock begins, at the moment any member of agency staff becomes aware of a confirmed pregnancy in a fostering household — by any route (in person, phone, text, email, supervision, a child, a placing authority, a third party).

Whoever becomes aware, records what they were told, by whom, when and how on the Foster Carer's record the same working day (out of hours: on-call log, transferred next working day); records the date and time of awareness, which is never adjusted; tells the SSW and RM the same day; and tells no one else until the SSW has agreed with the Foster Carer who knows.

Foster Carers are asked to tell their SSW as soon as a pregnancy is confirmed and within five working days. Before twelve weeks the information stays with the SSW and RM, and the record is marked restricted, unless the Foster Carer agrees otherwise or a child's safety requires wider sharing. Late notice is a learning conversation, not a disciplinary matter.

If a pregnancy ends, the assessment is closed with a short note. The SSW offers a visit within five working days, agrees what support the Foster Carer wants and what is said to the children, and lifts any adjustment only when the Foster Carer says she is ready.

4. Ownership and the 72-hour standard

Role	Responsibility

SSW (owner)	Completes the assessment with the Foster Carer, amends the safer care plan, agrees adjustments and support, records everything, and holds the assessment through every review until closure.
Registered Manager (accountable)	Accountable for the standard being met. Signs off every assessment within the 72 hours. Approves any restriction on placements with written reasons. Decides extensions and exceptions. May delegate sign-off to a deputy, not accountability.
Foster Carer (co-author)	Contributes her own knowledge of her health, home and children; signs the assessment. A partner or second Foster Carer takes part.
Cover	If the SSW is absent, the RM allocates another SSW or team manager the same day. The clock does not pause.

Within 72 clock hours of awareness, all of the following are done: an in-person visit to the home with the Foster Carer and partner; a review of each placed child's file; the assessment (Appendix B) completed across all eight domains, every amber or red rating with an action, owner and date; the safer care plan amended, at least on an interim basis; immediate adjustments and support agreed; Foster Carer signature; RM sign-off.

Where the deadline falls on a weekend or bank holiday, the RM may extend it to 12 noon on the next working day and records that. The only exceptions are the Foster Carer being away, in hospital, or asking for a delay: an interim assessment is completed by phone or video within 72 hours and the full visit within ten working days, with the exception recorded. Workload is not a reason. A missed deadline is recorded on the tracker with the reason and discussed in the SSW's next supervision.

5. What the assessment covers

Eight Domains	What we consider
A. Health and wellbeing of the foster carer	Emotional demands of the placement; sleep; support network; medical advice; complications.
B. Physical demands and the home	Lifting and carrying; driving; night-time disturbance and fatigue; falls risk.

Eight Domains	What we consider
C. Infection	CMV and parvovirus from close contact with young children (nappies, saliva); chickenpox and rubella immunity; blood-borne risks where a child's history indicates them; toxoplasmosis from pets.
D. Physical behaviour, intervention and supervision	Any placed child with a history of violence or unpredictable behaviour; the Foster Carer's reduced ability to manage safely.
E. Risks related to each child in placement	One block per child: what a baby will mean for them given their history (siblings removed, babies harmed, jealousy, loss, sexualised behaviour); their views; what they are told and when; what the placing authority needs to know.
F. Safer caring and the home	Personal care; supervision of children with the baby; bedrooms now and when the baby needs its own room (around two); safe sleep; other adults who will be in the home.
G. Household capacity and approval	Children placed and terms of approval; whether current placements still fit after the birth; the Foster Carer's plans for fostering after the birth.
H. Planning for the birth, placement stability and contingency	Due date; who cares for the children during labour and the early weeks; back-up arrangements from the Foster Carer's own network and, where possible, the agency; family time; what happens if the baby arrives early.

Each domain is rated green, amber or red. The assessment ends with a two-minute summary: overall picture, adjustments, support, what the children and placing authorities have been told, next review date.

6. Review points and triggers

Scheduled	Focus
Around 12 weeks	Who is told and how; direct work with children begins.
20–24 weeks	Physical demands and wellbeing; matching position.
By 32 weeks	Birth-cover plan on file; bedrooms and safe sleep agreed; placing authorities informed in writing.

Scheduled	Focus
Within 5 working days of birth	Home visit; household composition recorded; safer care plan for a baby in the home.
6–8 weeks after birth	Full review; Foster Carer's wishes; household review of approval scheduled.
Six months after birth	Closed, or carried into the annual review.

A trigger review takes place within five working days, sooner where a child's safety requires, when any of these occurs: a complication or medical advice restricting the Foster Carer; a new referral or proposed change to a placement; an incident, allegation or complaint; a change in a child's behaviour; a change in the Foster Carer's circumstances; a request from a placing authority or IRO; the pregnancy ending; an early or multiple birth; the Foster Carer asking.

7. Adjustments and support

Adjustments follow a hierarchy. First, change how things are done (hygiene, equipment, routines, travel, safe sleep, de-escalation only). Second, change who does them (lifting, personal care and difficult moments to the partner; back-up or respite where it can be arranged; family helpers added to the household record). Third, and only where neither is enough, change what the household takes on: a defined period without new placements, or a narrower profile. Level-three adjustments are an RM decision with written reasons, a review date and an end date. A planned move for a child (and any restriction on new placements) is a last resort, discussed with the placing authority and the child, and never because of the pregnancy alone.

Support is agreed in the assessment and recorded. The SSW thinks through cover for appointments, the birth and the early weeks, and travel to school and family time, and the agency supports these where possible; where it cannot, the plan records what the Foster Carer's own network will provide. Respite and transport are not promised. The Foster Carer is given clear information about fees and allowances, including the position during any period without placements. Training relevant to the household (safe sleep, infant first aid) and peer support are offered.

8. After the birth

The birth is a change in household composition under Schedule 5. The SSW visits within five working days and updates the record and the safer care plan. A household review of approval under Reg 28 is

completed within three months of the birth, or at the annual review if sooner, covering suitability for current placements, terms of approval, bedroom capacity now and at two years, and the Foster Carer's own capacity; the Form F is updated under the existing procedure. Where terms of approval change, the review goes to panel and the Agency Decision Maker. A baby may share the Foster Carer's bedroom to age two; a fostered child never shares with the Foster Carer's baby.

9. Staff guidance

- First response is congratulation, or care. Explain the assessment as something we do with every household, about what they need from us, done within three days. Ask who knows. Do not raise placement changes or fees in the first conversation unless the Foster Carer does.
- Read the children's files before the visit. Write with the Foster Carer, in her words. Be specific: every action has a named owner and a date. All-green with no actions, usually means a thorough assessment has not been carried out, this needs checking by the Registered Manager.
- Children placed are told by the Foster Carer with SSW support at the agreed point, usually after twelve weeks, with the child's social worker involved. Check the child's history first. Record the child's words. Tell children clearly, more than once, that a baby does not mean they will move.
- Inform each placing authority in writing at twelve weeks or when the Foster Carer agrees, sooner where a risk requires it; share the relevant summary, adjustments and birth-cover plan; invite them to the post-birth review.
- Record the pregnancy as a life event, not a risk factor attached to the Foster Carer. Restricted until the Foster Carer agrees wider sharing. If it is not recorded, it did not happen.

10. Supervision and quality assurance

The pregnancy is a standing item in every Foster Carer supervision session until closure: health and capacity, each child's response, open actions, adjustments to lift or add, next review date. Each SSW's own supervision record lists the assessments they hold with awareness date, sign-off date, next review and open reds; the manager checks the first assessment against the standard at the next supervision. The annual unannounced visit is not brought forward; an additional one may be arranged where the assessment gives a reason, recorded by the RM.

Check	Who / when	Looks for

Tracker (SharePoint list)	RM, weekly	One row per assessment: awareness time, sign-off time, hours elapsed, met / not met, extension or exception, next review, open reds, closed. Nothing open past 72 hours without a recorded extension; no review overdue.
File audit	Team manager or peer SSW from another group agency, quarterly, two files per agency	Appendix C checklist. Real updates, not copied forward; children's views in their own words; placing authorities informed in writing.
Reg 35 monitoring report	RM, quarterly	Number of assessments; % within 72 hours; exceptions; level-three adjustments; any placement ending in which a pregnancy was a factor.
Group oversight	All Agency Managers Meeting, quarterly	Compares agencies; agrees learning and changes to this policy.
Foster Carer feedback	SSW at closure	Did we respond quickly enough; did the support help.

Three measures are reported with their base: assessments signed off within 72 hours (target 100%, every exception explained); scheduled reviews on time; level-three adjustments and placement endings in which a pregnancy was a factor (no target).

11. Sources and caveats

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, regs 12, 17, 28, 35, Schedules 5 and 7; Fostering Services NMS 2011; Assessment and approval of Foster Carers statutory guidance (DfE 2013); Ofsted SCCIF for IFAs; Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 regs 16–18 and HSE guidance on new and expectant mothers; Lullaby Trust safer-sleep guidance; group health and safety, supervision and Form F procedures; Oni v LB Waltham Forest (ET 2025, under appeal).

Appendix A — the 72 hours

When	Who	What
Hour 0	Whoever hears	Record what, who, when, how. Timestamp. Tell SSW and RM the same day. Tell no one else.

When	Who	What
Same day	RM	Confirm SSW available or allocate cover. Open tracker row.
Same day	SSW	Phone the Foster Carer. Explain, book the visit, ask who knows. Read each placed child’s file.
By hour 48	SSW with Foster Carer and partner	Home visit. All eight domains. Actions with owner and date. Safer Caring Plan amended. Foster Carer signs.
By hour 60	SSW	Submit to RM with one-line summary and time of awareness.
By hour 72	RM	Check against the standard, sign off, record hours elapsed. Written reasons for any restriction.

Appendix B — assessment template (fields)

Part 1 Household and timing: household reference; agency; Foster Carer(s); other adults; Foster Carer’s own children; children placed (initials, ages, placing authority); expected date of birth; date and time of awareness and route; SSW; visit date; submitted; signed off; hours elapsed; extension or exception and reason.

Part 2 Who knows: who the Foster Carer has told; who may be told and when; date each child told and by whom; date each placing authority informed in writing.

Part 3 Eight domains: for each — discussion; Foster Carer’s view; rating; actions with owner and date. One block per child placed under domain E.

Part 4 Adjustments and support: level 1 and 2 agreed; any level 3 with RM reasons, start, review and end dates; support arranged; fees and allowances explained (date).

Part 5 Summary and sign-off: two-minute summary; safer care plan changes; next review date; Foster Carer, partner, SSW and RM signatures and dates.

Part 6 Review log: date; scheduled point or trigger; what changed; ratings now; actions opened or closed; manager initials.

Appendix C — file audit checklist

1. Time and route of awareness recorded; SSW and RM told the same day.
2. Home visit (or interim assessment plus recorded exception) within 72 hours; RM sign-off within 72 hours; hours elapsed on tracker.
3. Each placed child’s file reviewed before the visit.
4. All eight domains completed with the Foster Carer’s view; every amber or red has an action, owner and date.
5. Safer care plan amended and dated; Foster Carer and partner signatures.
6. Any level-three adjustment has RM written reasons, review and end dates.
7. Scheduled and trigger reviews on time and recorded as real updates.
8. Children’s views in their own words; placing authorities informed in writing.
9. Birth-cover plan on file by 32 weeks; post-birth visit within five working days; household review within three months.
10. Record restricted, until wider sharing agreed; fees and allowances explained; Foster Carer feedback collected at closure.