SSW Respite Procedure

Social Work Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/ssw-respite-procedure/

Purpose and Principles

This procedure provides clear guidance to ensure that any respite arrangements for children and young people are planned, communicated, and implemented in a way that is consistent with the principles of trauma-informed practice, attachment awareness, and the child's sense of safety and belonging.

Respite should always be considered in the context of the child's needs, emotional security, and relationships. The Positive Aspirations Group recognises that changes in a child's care environment can evoke anxiety, fear, or confusion, particularly for children who have experienced trauma or instability. Therefore, every decision relating to respite must prioritise continuity, connection, and clear communication.

Reference Documents

When an SSW becomes aware that a Foster Carer may need respite, they **must** consult the following:

- **Respite Policy**
- **Respite Procedure**
- **Respite Risk Assessment Template**

Introduction

Where respite is unavoidable, the Positive Aspirations Group's policy is that, wherever possible, children should be cared for by a **familiar, trusted, and emotionally safe person**, ideally identified from the Foster Carer's support network known **as Enhanced Support.**

The Positive Aspirations Group discourages respite periods of over 14 days unless it is demonstrably in the child's best interests. Longer breaks can disrupt attachment and stability. Where unavoidable, careful planning must occur to support the child's understanding and emotional adjustment.

In rare and exceptional cases where a Foster Carer requests respite for **28 days or longer**, this will be considered a **new placement**, as continuity and legal safeguards must be applied. The child would therefore be placed with an approved Foster Carer, and this cannot be Enhanced Support.

Where Foster Carers cannot use Enhanced Support, the Positive Aspirations Group will seek to identify an appropriate Foster Carer who can meet the child's needs. These arrangements will only proceed once the **local authority** has provided **written consent** and where they are in the **best interests of the child**.

This procedure safeguards all involved — the main Foster Carer, the Enhanced Support or respite Foster Carer, the child, and the agency — by ensuring clear communication, safe practice, and a positive respite experience.

The **Referrals and Placement Team (RRT)** must be informed and involved **as early as possible** in all respite planning.

All respite must have **written authorisation** from the **local authority** before commencing.

Actions for the SSW for the Foster Carers of the child/ young person having the respite.

Before any period of care is arranged with anyone other than the main Foster Carers, the above SSW must:

1. Discuss with their Team Manager/ Registered manager whether the planned respite is appropriate.
2. Notify the Referral Response Team via email as soon as it is known that the respite is needed.
3. Notify the relevant Supervising Social Worker and Team Manager if the proposed respite family is part of a different social-work team.
4. Notify the Local Authority Social Worker about the proposed respite as soon as possible, and must obtain written permission for it to proceed.
5. Complete a respite risk assessment, which includes the respite checklist, including all statutory checks are in place, send for signing and upload onto the base.

6. Ensure the foster carers for the children to add information to the relevant sections of the respite checklist as part of the respite risk assessment.
7. Review, update and share the young person's Safer Caring Policy and, where relevant Risk Assessment Matrix with:

- The Enhanced Support or Foster Carer providing the respite,
- Their Supervising Social Worker if different from the usual Foster Carer,
- The young person's Local Authority Social Worker

8. Ensure that either Enhanced Support or both sets of Foster Carers are aware of the financial arrangements for the respite.

9. Notify the Referral Response Team via email when the respite has started and when the respite has ended.

Actions for the SSW for the Foster Carers providing the respite (when different to the SSW for the SSW for the Foster Carers of the child/ young person having the respite)

1. The supervising social worker for the Foster Carers providing the respite must visit the home where the child is staying during the respite period and, depending on the duration, carry out an unannounced visit. The frequency of this must be detailed in the Respite Risk Assessment.

Actions for the Referral Response Team when the SSW for the Foster Carers of the child/young person requesting the respite requires support to identify respite Foster Carers.

The Referral Response Officer must:

1. It is the primarily the responsibility of the SSW to identify a respite Foster Carer within their teams and not the role of RRT. This should be done through discussions with fellow SSWs and the Team Manager/Registered Manager. If they have not been successful they can reach out to RRT for advice. RRT can also provide advice and guidance around potential vacancies as, where possible, Foster Carers being actively matched with should be avoided to minimise bed blocking.
2. If a potential Foster Carer has been identified, they must check whether that Foster Carer is on the vacancy list and confirm their availability to provide respite.

Actions for the Referral Response Team every time respite take place

The Referral Response Officer must:

1. Ensure that the child/ young person's most recent progress summary and referral are sent to the carer providing the respite.

2. Check the Terms of Approval and compliance for the Foster Carer providing the respite.

3. Discuss with RRT Team Manager if there is a need for a change to terms of approval. If this is the case, RRT Team Manager to discuss with relevant Registered Manager and SSW to confirm that this is an acceptable decision and the social work team will then complete the relevant change to terms of approval form.

4. Once a Foster Carer is identified, they must email the following documents to the Local Authority Social Worker and Commissioning Team: Redacted Form F, Carer profile, Welcome book/child friendly profile, Disclosure letter, most recent carer Review and an email with core information including details of:

a. Household make up

b. Availability

c. Experience

d. Any other relevant information

e. Whether room sharing is required

f. Confirmation that costings remain the same as in the main care arrangement

5. Notify the Finance Team of the planned respite so that the correct Foster Carer payments are made. Remember that the weekly fostering fee, including the child allowance, follows the child to the respite placement, and the usual Foster Carer is not paid while the child is on respite because this fee already includes respite.

6. Where relevant, they must obtain concurrent consent for the respite arrangement from the LASW of any other child in placement. If it is difficult to obtain consent, they must liaise with the SSW for the respite carer to help.

7. Actively follow up requests for concurrent consent and formal written consent for respite, and log all emails and telephone calls on the agency's recording systems.

8. Once respite is confirmed, enter it into the Referral Response Team member's diary or calendar.

9. Ensure that the Supervising Social Workers for the Foster Carer providing respite and the main Foster Carer know when respite will take place, and notify the Out-of-Hours Teams of the start and end dates. Record all contacts on agency systems.

10. When the Supervising Social Worker notifies the Referral Response Team that respite has started and ended the referral and response team must record this on agency system including updating the matching form so it is specific to the match with the respite Foster Carer. If technical issues occur when moving children and young people internally, ask IT for assistance.

11. All the actions above must be clearly recorded on the agency's dedicated recording systems.

12. At the end of the respite RRT must move the child back and again update the matching.

Actions for the Referral and Response team when respite is over 28 days

1. On the rare occasions when respite is needed for more than 28 days, it must be treated as a new placement:
2. The Referral Response Officer must update the Local Authority team that oversees placements for children and young people and send Form F and related documents.
3. The Referral Response Officer must input the start and end dates of the placement for the young person, using the agreed dates for the respite to begin and end.

Actions for the SSW for the carers where the child/ young person is now placed

1. Organise a Placement Planning Meeting and complete the Initial Placement Agreement.
2. Complete a new Safer Caring Policy.
3. Complete a 72-hour visit.
4. Continue visits in line with the requirements for children and young people who are newly placed with Foster Carers.

Financial Arrangements

Financial arrangements will be made directly between the main Foster Carer and Enhanced Support, without agency involvement.

When respite is provided by another Foster Carer within the Positive Aspirations Group, the fostering fee and child allowance will be paid directly to the Foster Carer who provides respite. The main Foster Carer will not be paid. A respite allowance was added to the fostering fee some years ago at the request of Foster Carers and should be set aside each week to cover the Foster Carer's costs if respite is needed.

Respite Periods Exceeding 28 Days

Where respite exceeds 28 days, this constitutes a **new placement** and the following actions must occur:

- RRT to notify the LA Placement Team and share updated documents.
- Complete placement end and start records in Base.
- Arrange a **Placement Planning Meeting** and **Initial Placement Agreement (IPA)**.

Complete SCP and initial visits (within 72 hours).