

Foster

for Walsall



Walsall Foster Carer Handbook 2023





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Introduction

Welcome to the Walsall Foster Carer Handbook. We are delighted that you have chosen to foster for Walsall Council and hope you have a rewarding and enjoyable career as a foster carer.

This foster carer handbook is designed to be a reference guide for both new and existing foster carers. The purpose of the handbook is to provide information and guidance to all our foster carers on fostering issues and the day to day practicalities you may face. Foster Carers play an important role in the lives of Children in Care and their families, so it is important that you have the necessary tools to assist you with this task. The handbook is one of these tools.

As this is an electronic handbook, it includes links to other useful websites. If you are aware of any sections that need updating, or links that aren't working please e-mail me. We have tried to make this handbook more concise and user friendly, however, if there is an area where you consider more detail is required, please let me know. The next version of this handbook will be produced in 2024/25. Please let me have any comments or suggestions.

As a Fostering Service, we are dedicated to providing the highest possible standard of care for our Children and Young People in foster care and we are passionate about ensuring our Children in Care receive the best possible start in life. There are many factors which will influence this, but arguably the most impactful is having a home and a loving family around the child.

Foster carers are vital to the success of Children's Services in Walsall; you are a member of the professional team working with the child in your care. In return for you giving so much of your time, skills and experience we in turn have a responsibility to support you. We aim to do this by providing you with regular good quality supervision and support from your Supervising Social Worker, and by giving you the opportunity to develop and improve your practice as a foster carer by offering you opportunities to develop and learn new skills.

Thank you all for the commitment and care you show towards the children you look after - it is hugely appreciated.

Mark Burrows

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Accidents

As a foster carer you are required to record any accident a child in your care has encountered, how it occurred and what action you have taken. Record this as soon as you can, as it may be difficult to remember or explain the signs of an injury weeks after. Always tell the child's Social Worker and the person with parental responsibility as soon as you can.

If the foster child has a more serious accident or sudden illness and requires medical or hospital treatment, consent to treatment will be required. Therefore, it is a good idea to have the relevant medical consent form readily available.

Young people aged sixteen years or over give their own consent to medical treatment. Some children under sixteen years of age may also be able to give or refuse consent if they are considered to have sufficient understanding.

You must notify the child's Social Worker as soon as you have organised any medical treatment. You also need to inform your Supervising Social Worker.

If the accident occurs outside office hours, notify the Emergency Response Team on 0300 5552922.

Accommodated/Looked After

There are a number of reasons why a child may be 'looked after' by the local authority. Most often it is because the child's parents or the people who have parental responsibilities and rights to look after the child are unable to care for them, have been neglecting them or the child has committed an offence. The local authority has specific responsibilities and duties towards a child who is being looked after or who has been looked after.

The child may be:

- in local authority accommodation under a voluntary arrangement, where the child's parents agree to the child being accommodated; or
- in local authority accommodation or at home, under compulsory measures decided by a children's hearing or a court (usually on a Care Order or Interim Care Order)

Allegations - also see Complaints

If an allegation is made directly to you about another person's conduct towards a child, you should inform your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker.

Allegations are occasionally made against foster carers. This places foster carers in a difficult and sometimes distressing situation.

Walsall Council has an investigation procedure which aims to deal with allegations against carers in a confidential way that is quick, fair and impartial.

Facts:

- One in six foster carers has a complaint or allegation made against them during their fostering career.
- Carers who have allegations made against them tend to have been fostering for over five years.
- All the forms of abuse that can occur within children's birth families can occur in foster families.
- All allegations will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately.

Categories of allegation:

- Proven - An allegation is supported by fact and found to be true.
- False - An allegation which evidence shows to be untrue.
- Unsubstantiated - An allegation which cannot be proven to be true or false.

Why a foster child might be abused:

- Some people will be attracted to fostering because it provides the opportunity to abuse children (sexual abuse).
- The carers' behaviour may discriminate against the child or young person they are fostering (physical/emotional/racial abuse)
- Carers may lose their temper (physical/emotional abuse).
- Children who have been abused may behave in ways that appear to 'invite' abuse because they may 'expect' to be abused again. Members of the foster home must ensure that they do not get drawn in and repeat past patterns (sexual/physical/emotional abuse).

- Carers may react to the impact (on their own children) of caring for children who have been abused.

Why a foster child might make a false allegation of abuse:

- Children can misinterpret an innocent action.
- As a way of drawing attention to previous abuse for the first time because the carer is trusted
- As a way of exercising some control over their life.
- To try and end a foster placement without losing face.

What can we do to reduce risks?

- Recognise the people in the foster carers' home who are potential risks or may be vulnerable to allegations.
- Know Walsall Council's policy and procedure for investigating allegations. Detailed information can be found at the following link: www.walsallchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_alleg_fos_car.html
- Keep a daily log of events.
- Operate clear home rules for ways of behaving.
- Work out your own family safer care policy for keeping everyone safe.
- Have a support network.
- Make use of training.
- Make sure you have adequate insurance cover.
- Work closely with the agency and keep communication open.

When an allegation is made against a foster carer, it can be a very stressful time. Your Supervising Social Worker will provide support but will not be able to discuss the allegation during the investigation period and this can result in carers feeling isolated and unsupported.

The fostering service will give foster carers key information on allegations and complaints as part of their induction.

The Fostering Network are available to offer advice to foster carers about allegations. If you are subject to an allegation, Walsall Council can provide you with independent support; should you require this, please discuss with your Supervising Social Worker or a Manager in the Fostering Service.

Allowances - see section on Finances

Babysitting/Staying with friends

The Fostering Service recognises that all parents (including foster carers) need a break and occasionally have to leave children with a trusted adult such as a relative or babysitter.

Following the introduction of new regulations it is no longer a requirement to seek the permission of the child's Social Worker or Supervising Social Worker. Foster carers are able to use their own discretion and judgement as would any good parent in these circumstances under delegated authority, unless the Placement Plan states otherwise.

A foster child may ask to visit or sleep over at a friend's house. It is the foster carer's responsibility to find out everything they can about the people the child wishes to visit. Foster carers are expected to have met the adults, have an address and telephone number and be confident the child will not be at risk of harm.

Belongings

Foster children may bring items of clothing, toys or other possessions with them when they come to live with you. These belongings may not seem very valuable to an adult but they may be precious to a child and should therefore be treated with respect.

Remember, the child has been separated from their family and familiar surroundings and placed with strangers. What may appear to be an unimportant item to you may be the child's most treasured possession.

It is good practice to keep an inventory of the child's belongings and to amend this when items are accumulated and disposed of.

Birth Certificate

If a birth has been registered then a birth certificate recording the details of the child's birth will be available. If a copy of a child's birth certificate is required, foster carers should contact the child's Social Worker or seek advice from the Supervising Social Worker.

Blood-borne Viruses: HIV and Hepatitis

Blood-borne viruses are infectious agents that some people carry persistently in their blood. They can cause severe disease in some cases and few or no symptoms in others. The virus can be spread to another person and this may occur whether the carrier of the virus is ill or not.

The main blood-borne viruses of concern are:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS);
- Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

Blood-borne viruses are spread by direct contact with the blood of an infected person. Certain other body fluids may also be infectious e.g. semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. It should be noted that blood-borne viruses are not spread by normal social contact and daily activities e.g. coughing, sneezing, kissing, hugging, holding hands, or sharing bathrooms, swimming pools, toilets, food, cups, cutlery and crockery.

Hepatitis B infection can be prevented by immunisation.

Immunisation of Looked After Children - The need of a child to be tested for, or immunised against, Hepatitis B should be considered as part of the medical assessment of a child before placement.

Immunisation of foster carers - The need to offer immunisation to foster carers should be based on a risk assessment by the local authority making the placement.

Consent to testing - Young people should be given age-appropriate information and advice so that the nature of the test and the implications of a positive test are well understood. A young person aged 16 and above may give their own consent to medical tests, examination or treatment. However, for a child below the age of 16 and a child aged 16 who may lack the capacity to make the decision, consent may be given by a person with parental responsibility. Children under the age of 16 may give consent to or refuse testing, examination and treatment, if they are capable of understanding the reasons and the nature and implications of the test. It is for the doctor concerned to decide about capacity.

Sources of advice:

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis
- www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids
- www.brook.org.uk | www.becomecharity.org.uk

Bullying

Bullying is defined as ‘deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated over a period of time when it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves’ (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015).

Many Looked After Children experience bullying at school, in the local area and sometimes from other children in the foster home. Bullying can include the following:

- Name calling and teasing
- Threats, extortion and theft
- Physical violence
- Damage to someone’s belongings
- Leaving people out of social activities deliberately and frequently
- Spreading malicious rumours
- Bullying by mobile phone, text message or e-mail

Looked After Children are often targets for bullies for one or more of the following reasons:

- The child feels and/or appears different. School life can highlight difference, for example they may arrive at school by taxi, they may not be able to participate in after school clubs, and they may be withdrawn from some lessons to attend meetings/reviews.
- The child may not be achieving as well as others in their class.
- The child may have had multiple moves and changes of carer/school.
- The child may not have an established friendship group.
- The child may not want other children to know that they are Looked After.
- The child may feel isolated and believe that they have no-one to talk to at school.

Difficult and distressing life experiences can lead some children to develop poor self-esteem and a corresponding lack of “coping” strategies.

The damage inflicted by bullying is frequently underestimated. It can cause considerable stress to children to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes them significant harm, which may include self harm.

Make sure you are mindful of bullying, talk to your foster child about bullying and work through how they would respond. Ask about school and school friends on a regular basis.

Any incidents of bullying should be recorded in your daily logs.

Some signs of bullying can be:

- Excuses for not wanting to go to school
- Unexplained bruises
- Torn clothing
- Need for extra money
- Continually losing belongings
- Problems sleeping
- Sudden loss of appetite
- Sudden academic problems
- Sullen/withdrawn behaviour or temper outbursts
- Unusually hungry at the end of the school day
- (lunch money being taken)
- Rushing to the bathroom after school (fear of going to the school toilets).

What to do if you think your foster child is bullying or being bullied:

- Continue to act on the advice from the child's Social Worker and other professionals on ways to help build the child's self-esteem.
- Help the child establish a script to use to help explain why they are living with foster carers.
- Encourage friendships and invite school friends home. There is strength in numbers and children need to stay near to other children even if they are not close friends. Bullies quickly target a child who is alone.
- Build social skills: problem solve difficult social situations and practice suitable responses over a meal.
- Do not reject a child who is a bully; reject the behaviour. Explain how the behaviour makes other children unhappy and help them develop alternative strategies to feel better about themselves and to express their unhappiness.
- Give the child praise each time they are cooperative or are kind to someone.
- Consult with the child's Social Worker and make an arrangement for both of you to see the child's class teacher or year tutor.

What can the school do?

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires all schools to have a behaviour policy that includes anti-bullying measures. Its primary aim is to reduce and eradicate, wherever possible, instances in which children and young people are subject to bullying in any form. In this context all schools should have their own individual anti-bullying policy.

Schools in Walsall take the issue of bullying very seriously and employ a range of strategies to resolve these situations. For Looked After Children there will be an identified member of staff in the school who will have responsibility for the care of Looked After Children. During any meeting at school the action to be taken, by whom and within what timescale should be agreed.

The Virtual School (see "Education") can be a source of support and advice. Maintain good communication between yourself and the school. You need to work closely with school and employ the same strategies to support the child you are caring for.

There are many resources on bullying that your Supervising Social Worker will be able to direct you to. Libraries also have a number of books and resources for carers and children on bullying. The following website is nationally recognised as providing excellent advice and support on issues related to bullying.

 www.familylives.org.uk

Foster Carers should be aware of the dangers of "Cyber Bullying" and need to exercise vigilance around internet, Facebook and mobile phone use. See "Staying Safe Online" section for further details.

Cafcass

When a local authority applies to take a child into care, Cafcass' job is to ensure that decisions are made in the child's best interests. When working on Care cases the Cafcass worker is known as the Children's Guardian.

For further information see the section **Children's Guardian**.



Care Plans

All children being Looked After will have a written plan that clearly states what the plan for him or her is now and in the future.

The following people may be involved in making plans for a child's future:

- The child/young person
- Social Worker
- Extended family
- Foster carers
- Residential Social Workers
- Education staff
- Medical professionals and advisors
- Supervising Social Worker
- Cafcass Children's Guardian
- Independent Reviewing Officer

Challenging Behaviour

Children can sometimes exhibit behaviour that can be difficult to manage and can include the use of bad language, throwing objects and refusing to co-operate with simple tasks or instructions. This behaviour is often a result of early formative life experiences and is a way of coping with what the child sees as a difficult situation. For many children it is a way of trying to gain some control and predictability over their lives. In managing challenging behaviour, it is important to remember that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable and not the child displaying it.

Walsall Fostering Service has a 'no smacking' policy within foster homes and there is a clear expectation that foster carers should never physically chastise a foster child.

How to cope with challenging behaviours:

- Try to understand the reasons why the child is behaving in this way.
- Instead of disciplining bad behaviour, always encourage and praise good behaviour. Give simple rewards, such as a gold star or a treat, and praise the child when he or she is obviously trying.
- Try to be realistic and set goals the child can reasonably achieve.

- Be clear and consistent in your approach and ensure that everybody in the household knows what the approach is.
- If small children have a tantrum or do something that is a danger to themselves or others, pick them up and remove them from the situation with a firm “No!”
- In extreme circumstances you may have to physically restrain a child who is about to harm him/herself or others. Only use such efforts as needed to calm the situation. Remember that this ‘attention’ can be seen by the child as a reward and could reinforce the problem.
- Arguing with children can easily become a habit: try not to escalate arguments. State your case and say no more; move away or change the subject. Choose a calmer time to tell the child what the results will be if he or she continues to behave in this way.
- Don’t be afraid to admit you are wrong or angry, and don’t be afraid to compromise or negotiate with a child. Once you have made the consequences of the behaviour clear, follow it through. Giving in will give the child the wrong message.
- There is little point in threatening punishment you cannot enforce. You must not lock the child alone in a room.
- Do not ignore serious matters such as stealing or violent behaviour.

Above all, remember that you do not have to deal with everything on your own. Any problems should always be discussed with your Supervising Social Worker or the child’s Social Worker.

It is vitally important that any episodes of challenging, threatening or dangerous behaviour, including going missing, are recorded in the foster carer daily logs. This can often help in identifying “triggers” for behaviour and help plan for managing possible future episodes.

Changes in Circumstances foster carers

If there are any significant changes in your household, you should inform your Supervising Social Worker. For example, if somebody joins or leaves the household, if you become unwell, injured or receive a diagnosis, involvement with the police, change in employment status.

Changing a child’s name

It is vital for a child to be aware of their identity and their birth name is a major part of this.

Foster carers are not allowed to change the surname or the forename of a child placed with them. Where a child is considering changing their name you should seek advice from the child’s Social Worker or your Supervising Social Worker.

Child Abuse

Children are placed with foster carers for a variety of reasons. Some children may have suffered physical, emotional, psychological or sexual abuse, all of which are damaging to them.

As part of the fostering training and development programme, all foster carers will be offered training and support to enable them to care for children who have suffered harm and abuse.

If a child is thought to be at risk of abuse they may be subject to a Child Protection Plan. Involved agencies will work towards achieving the plan. The plan will only cease by agreement of a Child Protection Conference.

For further information see the section **Child Protection Conferences**.

Child Benefit - see section on Finances

Child Protection Conferences

A Child Protection Conference is a formal meeting at which people who are involved with a child, come together to discuss concerns about the child’s welfare.

A Child Protection Conference may be held:

- When it appears that a child may need some kind of protection plan, services and/or statutory intervention.
- When it appears that the existing child protection arrangements may need to be strengthened or relaxed.
- When, in the case of a child who is subject to a Child Protection Plan and who has been removed from home, there is a proposal to return that child home, whether for overnight stays or by way of home trial.
- When there is a proposal to cease the Child Protection Plan for a child.

Who should attend the Conference?

The Conference should include as many people as is necessary in order to make and implement informed plans for a child's protection, and as few people as is compatible with effective decision making. The child's parents will usually be invited to attend the Conference depending on the circumstances of the case.

What is the foster carer's role at a Child Protection Conference?

If a child placed with you is subject to a Child Protection Conference, you will be invited to attend in order to inform the meeting of your observations of the child's behaviour and to take part in discussions about the child's plan. It will help if you have recorded any observations that are relevant. If you feel uneasy about attending a Child Protection Conference, contact your Supervising Social Worker to talk it through.

What will happen at the Conference?

- The purpose of the Child Protection Conference will be made clear before introductions take place.
- The Chair of the Conference will invite all parties to contribute to the meeting and to share information in respect of the child's physical, social and emotional development.
- The Conference will assess whether or not the child is at risk of harm and will decide on a plan that will mitigate any risks and identify changes that need to take place.
- The Conference will consider whether or not those agencies with statutory powers should invoke those powers and how.
- Once all information has been shared, the Conference will decide whether to start or cease a Child Protection Plan.
- All decisions will be recorded and minutes of the meeting will be distributed accordingly.

Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 allocates duties to local authorities, courts, parents and other agencies in the UK, to ensure children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted.

The principles of the Children Act are:

- The best place for children to be looked after is within their own families.
- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Birth parents should be involved in all planning and decision making affecting their children.
- Legal proceedings should be avoided where possible.
- The welfare of the child should be promoted by a partnership between the family and the local authority.
- Children should not be removed from their families and contact should not be ended unless it is absolutely necessary to do so in order to protect the child's welfare. When this does happen it should be through a Court Order.
- The child's needs arising from their race, culture, religion and language must be taken into consideration.

Children's Guardian

Children's Guardians are qualified and experienced Social Workers appointed by the Court to represent the rights and interests of children in applications for legal orders made by the local authority. They are independent of local authorities, the courts and everyone else involved in the case.

Children's Guardians are there to help achieve the best possible outcomes for the children they represent. **In particular, they will:**

- Appoint a solicitor for the children who specialises in working with children and families
- Advise the court about what work needs to be done before the court makes its decision.
- Write a report for the court saying what they think would be best for the children. The report must tell the court about the wishes and feelings of the children.

To do this, the Children's Guardian will collate information from multiple sources. They will talk to the child's family and other professionals involved; they will attend important meetings about the case; and they will visit the child at home in placement. During this visit, the Guardian may ask you for information about the child and what your views are. Remember that the information you share may be used in reports provided to the Court.

Complaints

From time to time, complaints may arise, either as a result of something the local authority has or hasn't done or about a decision that has been made. Depending on the nature of the problem most issues can be resolved informally through discussion with either your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker. Sometimes, Team Managers or Assistant Team Managers may be the more appropriate people to speak to about your concerns. However, if the matter cannot be resolved in this way the formal complaints procedure can be used.

The procedure for dealing with a complaint will depend on what it is about. Any complaints about services that are being provided to a child in your care are dealt with under the Statutory Representations and Complaints Procedure, whereas complaints relating to your role as a foster carer are dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

If you are raising a complaint on behalf of a child in your care, you should always check with the child, where possible, that they are happy for you to raise the complaint.

Anyone not satisfied with the council, its services or the actions of its staff can let us know by filling in the form at the following link:

 int.walsall.gov.uk/Portals/0/TellUs/tell_us_leaflet.pdf

What happens when I make a complaint:

Step 1

If your complaint is not resolved informally, you can make a formal complaint to:

- The office dealing with the matter
- Any council office
- The council's website: www.walsall.gov.uk
- By post to: Walsall Council, Civic Centre, Walsall, WS1 1TP

Step 2

You will receive an acknowledgement within five working days.

Step 3

Your complaint will be investigated by the service concerned and a formal response sent within a further 15 working days. In cases where investigations could be lengthy you will be advised of any delay.

Step 4

If you are not satisfied with the response, you can ask for your complaint to be considered by a senior manager in the service.

Step 5

If you are still not satisfied you may go to the Local Government Ombudsman, who is independent of the council and can investigate how you have been treated. Ombudsman leaflets are available at council offices or direct from the Local Government Ombudsman.

Confidentiality

When a child is placed in your care, you will receive important information about the child's background to enable you to care for the child and meet their needs. This information may include details about the child and their family, and the circumstances which led to them coming to live with you. Much of the information will be personal and all of it is told to you in confidence.

Who else needs to know?

You may need to share some of this information with your children and family members who are likely to have regular contact with the child. You should know how much your own children can cope with, depending on their age and maturity and it is important to emphasise the need for confidentiality.

Who does not need to know?

Friends and neighbours do not need to know confidential information about the child in your care; it is none of their business. A firm refusal to talk about confidential information will usually stop questions.

Can I talk to other foster carers?

All foster carers are governed by the same principles of confidentiality. It is possible that another foster carer may have experienced the same issues that you have and you may ask for general advice from them. This would not be breaking confidentiality, but you must not discuss specific details of a child's case or their background.

What if the child tells me a secret?

Like any other child, Looked After Children need someone to talk to. However, if the information they share with you is likely to have an impact on their future, you should encourage the child to share this information with their Social Worker. If the child will not do this, it is essential that you tell the child

you will have to share what they told you with the professionals involved.

Some information cannot be kept secret/confidential. For example, if a child tells you that they have been abused or ill-treated you must inform the child's Social Worker.

Connected Persons (also known as Family & Friends Care or Kinship Care)

Connected Persons are relatives, friends or other persons connected to a child, who have been approved as foster carers for them.

The assessment of Connected Persons is usually undertaken by the Connected Persons assessors. Support for Connected Persons will be provided by an allocated Supervising Social Worker.

Connected Persons who are approved for 12 months are expected to have completed the Skills to Foster training. The exception to this would be carers who are in the process of, or about to apply for a Special Guardianship Order.

Connected Persons approved for 18 months are expected to have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers.

Walsall Fostering Service is committed to offering Connected Persons a high level of support to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children they care for.

Contact (see Family Time)

Corporal Punishment

Walsall Council does not accept the use of corporal punishment. This means that a foster carer should NEVER physically chastise a child in their care. It is important to remember, many of the children being Looked After by the local authority have witnessed or experienced physical abuse, therefore physical punishment merely reinforces the belief that adults hurt children.

We believe that corporal punishment is not an appropriate method of changing or controlling a child's behaviour: it will merely teach the child what is not desired, not what is acceptable. Corporal punishment tends only to work when the threat of further punishment is present, and the child will quickly learn how to avoid the punishment, rather than how to behave in an acceptable way.

Most children want your approval, so telling them you are not pleased, in many cases will prove very effective, particularly if you follow it with an opportunity for the child to 'wipe the slate clean' and make a fresh start. Not hitting a child does not mean you have to bottle up your feelings. One of the most sensible things you can do when you feel the anger building up or the urge to strike out, is to talk to others about how you feel. Talk to your partner, friends, relatives or Social Worker. This is a good time to make use of your support networks.

The Fostering Service has close links with, CAMHS and FLASH, and the Children's Workforce Development Team. These services can offer practical advice, support and training around managing complex and difficult to manage challenging behaviour.

(Going to) Court

In certain circumstances foster carers may be requested to give evidence to the courts. You are expected to keep accurate records during any placement and these will be important in assisting your responses.

Going to court to give evidence may seem like a daunting experience; however, your Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker will offer advice and support that will help you to prepare.

Court Orders

Under the Children Act 1989, court orders are to be used as a last resort. It is not necessary for foster carers to be experts in child care law but it will be helpful to have an understanding of some of the more common court orders, such as:

Emergency Protection Order (EPO)

Under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority can apply for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) where there are reasonable grounds for believing there is an immediate risk of significant harm to a child. The EPO allows the local authority to remove a child to a place of safety and can last up to 8 days with a possible extension of up to 7 days. 72 hours after the EPO is made, an application for discharge can be made by the child's parents, any other person with parental responsibility for the child, the child themselves, or anyone with whom the child was living at the time the order was made.

Interim Care Order

When the local authority has made an application for a Care Order, the court may grant an Interim Care Order (under Section 38 of the Children Act 1989), if the proceedings are adjourned or there is a direction for an investigation into the child's home circumstances. This may last for up to eight weeks in the first instance.

Care Order

Under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority can apply for a Care Order where there is evidence to suggest that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, and that this is because the care being given to the child is not what is reasonable to expect of a parent or the child is beyond parental control. A Care Order grants the local authority parental responsibility for the child and the local authority may then determine the extent to which the child's parents may exercise their parental responsibility. The local authority will make decisions about where the child will live and with whom, and what contact the child will have with his or her family. The Care Order will remain in force until the child reaches 18 years of age, unless it is ended earlier by an application to discharge the order or by an alternative order, such as an Adoption Order or a Special Guardianship Order.

Special Guardianship Order

Under Section 14 of the Children Act 1989, certain individuals can apply for a Special Guardianship Order that appoints the applicant as the child's

Special Guardian. The Guardian is granted parental responsibility for the child, including responsibility for all day-to-day decisions relating to the child's care and upbringing. A Special Guardianship Order may be used to achieve legal permanence for a child as an alternative to he or she remaining looked after by the local authority.

Child Arrangement Order

Under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989, certain individuals can apply for a Child Arrangement Order that will decide who the child is to live with and/or who the child will spend time with (contact). A Child Arrangement Order may be used to achieve legal permanence for a child as an alternative to he or she remaining looked after by the local authority.

Delegated Authority - see the section on Placement Plans

De-registration

When an individual or a couple are approved as foster carers their details and information relating to their approval status and matching preferences are formally registered. In certain circumstances it might be necessary for the Fostering Service to initiate proceedings to de-register a foster carer, for example, if there were concerns about the standard of care being provided to Looked After Children.

If de-registration is being considered, there is a procedure that the Fostering Service must follow and the foster carer will be given every opportunity to express their views on the matter.

If a foster carer wishes to resign this must be done in writing; it should be signed, and where it is a couple, signed by both foster carers. A letter will be sent to the foster carer by a manager in the Fostering Service, acknowledging the written resignation and noting the date it was received and the date from which the resignation will take effect (this will be 28 days after the letter is received by the Fostering Service). Please note, that once a resignation is received by the Fostering Service, it cannot be withdrawn.

The Independent Reviewing Officer for foster carer reviews will be notified of the carer's resignation and will contact them to arrange an exit interview.

Further information regarding Walsall Fostering Service de-registration procedure can be obtained from your Supervising Social Worker.

Diary Sheets - see section on Recording

Dinner Money - see section on Finances

Disruption Meetings - see section on Placement Support Meetings and Disruption Meetings

Drug Abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse is an increasing problem amongst young people, who can be tempted to take or experiment with drugs regardless of their home and social circumstances.

If you are concerned that a child placed with you may be using drugs, you should contact the child's Social Worker and your Supervising Social Worker to discuss these concerns.

It is often difficult to tell if a young person is using drugs, particularly when the drug use is new or infrequent. Some possible indications of drug abuse are:

- Sudden changes in mood from happy and alert to sullen and moody.
- Unusually irritable
- Loss of appetite
- Bouts of drowsiness or sleepiness
- Increased evidence of telling lies or secretive behaviour
- Unexplained loss of money or belongings from the home

Remember, many of these signs can be easily confused with the usual issues of growing up in teenage years and expected adolescent development. It is important not to jump to the wrong conclusions but to raise your concerns with the professionals involved as soon as possible. Further specialist training is available.

Please also see the list of useful numbers for organisations that will be able to provide information, advice and support on drugs. www.talktofrank.com.

Eating Problems

Children and young people have very different eating habits and preferences. Some will have large appetites whilst others may be reluctant to eat much, which can be common at the start of a placement. These differences are to be expected and are not usually a cause for concern; however, some eating problems are serious and can have a damaging effect on physical and emotional health. The most common eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Compulsive Eating Disorder.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder where a person keeps their body weight as low as possible by restricting the amount of food they eat, making themselves vomit and exercising excessively.

The condition often develops out of an anxiety about body shape and weight that originates from a fear of being fat or a desire to be thin. Many people with anorexia have a distorted image of themselves and think they are fat when they aren't.

Bulimia

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder where a person tries to control their weight by severely restricting the amount of food they eat, then binge eating and purging the food from their body by making themselves vomit or using laxatives. It is important to remember that children and young people with bulimia may not appear over or underweight.

Compulsive Eating Disorder

People with a compulsive or binge eating disorder, overeat on a regular basis and may consume large quantities of food to cope with feelings of unhappiness and low self-esteem. Weight gain is a common physical effect of binge eating, which can lead to obesity.

Eating disorders tend to develop in adolescence and should be treated as a serious mental health condition. As well as having adverse effects on the person's physical health, eating disorders are also associated with psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-harm.

It is not always easy for foster carers to spot the signs of eating disorders but some indicators may be:

- Regularly skipping meals and obsessively counting calories
- Eating only low calorie food
- Avid interest in buying or cooking food for others
- Wearing very loose clothes to hide the body
- An obsession with exercise
- Dramatic weight gain or loss
- Food missing in large amounts from fridge/larder
- Disappearing from the table directly after meal (in order to make themselves vomit)

Eating disorders most commonly affect girls and women, although you should be mindful that it has become more common in boys and men in recent years. If you are concerned about the eating habits of a child or young person placed with you, talk to his or her Social Worker as soon as possible.

Education

Education is a universal entitlement and a fundamental right for all children. Attending school is an important part of everyday life and can provide a sense of security and stability for Looked After Children, whose educational development may be adversely affected by their early life experiences and any subsequent placement moves. It is vital that, where possible, children in foster care remain in their current school, where they have an existing support network of friends and teachers.

As a corporate parent, Walsall Council is committed to helping every Looked After Child to achieve the highest educational standards they possibly can. Foster carers have an important role to play in this and should work in partnership with the child's school. You may need to advocate for the child and appeal decisions that you feel are not in the child's best interests. You will be expected to attend parent/carer evenings, sports days and other events to support the child.

Walsall Council's Virtual School provides services and support for the education of Looked After Children. Together with the child's Social Worker, staff at the Virtual School work with schools to raise the educational attainment and aspirations of Looked After Children and to promote and support positive participation in enrichment activities. They are a key point of contact for students and work in partnership with designated safeguarding leads and designated teachers for Looked After Children.

Every Looked After Child is entitled to a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is a statutory requirement for all Looked After Children. It is the overarching education plan for the child or young person and will also look at their social and emotional development. The plan will set and review short term targets in support of longer term educational outcomes. It will include the views and aspirations of the child or young person and bring together other education plans, such as a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The PEP is part of the child or young person's Care Plan and must be reviewed at least every six months at a meeting usually held at the child or young person's school. It is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to invite you to this meeting, which may also be attended by the child or young person themselves, their parents, the designated teacher and anybody else involved in supporting the child's education.

The PEP provides a continuous running record of the child's school history and identifies any additional and educational needs that they may have. However, if you are concerned about any aspect of the child's education, you should raise this with the child's Social Worker and an interim PEP meeting may be held. As the child's foster carer, you will receive a copy of the PEP and should actively support and encourage the child or young person to achieve the targets set.

 Walsall Council's procedure regarding the education of Looked After Children

Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, you should contact the child's Social Worker or your Supervising Social Worker immediately. If they are unavailable, you may ask to talk to the Duty Officer or the Team Manager.

Outside of office hours, an emergency service is operated by the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) that can be contacted on 0300 555 2922.

Examples of emergencies that should be reported are: if you feel that the child or young person has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm; if the child or young person has made an allegation against you or a member of your family; if the child or young person is missing or has had an accident or health-related emergency; if the fostering home is in immediate crisis and has broken down.

If it's not an emergency, but you need support and advice out of hours, please contact the "Out of Hours Support Line". See section later in the handbook.

(Nocturnal) Enuresis

Any child who has suffered a traumatic experience may begin to wet the bed. Children placed with foster carers will almost certainly feel distressed and it is important to be patient and allow the child time to settle and feel safe and secure. Displaying annoyance or attempting to punish the child will merely add to their distress and may make the problem worse. Praising the child for a dry night is more likely to support and encourage them. Persistent bed wetting could be an indication of another problem and a referral to a specialist service may be appropriate. Speak to your Supervising Social Worker about this and about advice and helpful hints for managing bedwetting.



Equality and Diversity

If children are to grow into adulthood with a sense of identity and confidence, they need to be cared for by people who will be able to help and support them with issues in respect of their racial origin and religious persuasion, and be able to talk positively with them about their cultural background. A negative view of these issues and the loss of the language spoken by the child's birth parents and community may take away from the child's self-esteem and limit their choices in life.

These issues apply equally to all children. Nobody is without a 'culture'. However, it has to be recognised that we live in a society where there are inequalities of power between different communities. As a foster carer, you have a moral and professional duty to consider the extent to which the decisions being made in respect of your foster child may further disadvantage him or her and be willing to argue for change where this is necessary.

It is important to avoid stereotypes and assumptions about a child's beliefs, language and culture. We all wish to be valued as individuals and become angry when assumptions are made about us; we are also upset if fundamental aspects of our background are ignored. You should take into account all of the information about the child that is made available to you and spend time talking to him or her to ensure their individual needs are met.

Language

This may seem difficult if you are caring for a child or young person for whom English is not their first language. In this instance, the child's Social Worker may arrange for an interpreter to be present for important statutory meetings; however, day to day communication with the child will often rely on your ability to translate simple words and phrases and to think creatively about non-verbal means of communication. You should never ridicule or try to suppress the way a child speaks.

Religion

Children need to be placed with foster carers who can meet their religious needs. This is not to say that you will need to share the child's religious beliefs but that you may be required to discuss alternative religious beliefs with a child and enable them to, for example, attend services and events and access information appropriate to their religious persuasion.

Diet is central to the beliefs and actions of many religions. You need to be aware of and sensitive to this, in addition to other care needs, such as dress and hygiene. It may be useful to familiarise yourself with the central beliefs of different faiths and places of worship, and to find out where in your local community you may purchase food items that meet certain religious dietary requirements.

You should never seek to change a child's religion where their religious beliefs are already established. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to insist that the child observes your religious practices and you should seek advice from the child's Social Worker before involving the child in any such activity.

Racism

As a foster carer, you have a responsibility to adopt an anti-racist approach. It is not enough to practice in a way that is non-racist because this is a neutral stance that fails to challenge or oppose racism. It is important that you are able to recognise forms of prejudice and discrimination, and be able to respond to incidents of racism when they occur. Be aware of words and phrases which cause offence or discomfort and replace them with acceptable alternatives; promote positive images of different races, cultures and religions; and encourage the child to acknowledge and celebrate a diverse range of festivals and holidays.

Sexuality

All young people have the right to experience relationships based upon mutual respect and to be comfortable with their own sexuality. They are entitled to receive advice and guidance that promote positive relationships and their sexual wellbeing. If the child in your care is exploring their sexual or gender identity, they will need your support, acceptance and understanding through what might be a confusing and difficult time. It is important that you model behaviour that decreases ignorance, prejudice and stigma around sexual and gender identities.

If you need more information and advice about how to meet and/or understand a child's needs, talk to the child's Social Worker and your Supervising Social Worker. Remember, the best place for children to be looked after is within their own families and many Looked After Children will return to the care of their birth parents; this further emphasises the need to maintain the child's cultural identity for the period of time that he or she is in foster care. Walsall Council offers a number of induction workshops and training courses about a range of equality and diversity issues that you are encouraged to access.

Equipment

Foster Carers will be provided with a set up grant when they are first approved as foster carers; they are expected to provide basic equipment that may be needed to carry out their role.

- Beds/bed linen/duvets/pillows
- Wardrobes
- Chest of drawers
- Car seats

Baby equipment/pushchairs/stair gates/fireguards/cots etc. should conform to British Safety Standards.

Foster carers are expected to purchase replacement equipment using the allowances and fees they receive. In very exceptional circumstances financial support may be available. In line with the local authority financial regulations no expenditure should be entered into without first obtaining the agreement of relevant members of staff and this will usually be a Fostering Team Manager or child's Social Worker. You will not be reimbursed for expenditure entered into without prior agreement.

(School) Exclusions

If a child is excluded for any reason the foster carer or child's Social Worker should inform the Virtual School. The reason for exclusion will need to be investigated so that the most appropriate support /intervention can be put in place. An Interim PEP may be arranged at this point.

Fallings Heath

The Fostering Teams are based at Fallings Heath, Walsall Road, WS10 9SH (01922 652680). If you are a foster carer for Walsall, you will have a Supervising Social Worker who is based here.

Family Time

Family time with children's families and other significant persons has a fundamental role in the Care Plans of children and young people who are fostered. The law clearly states that local authorities have a duty to promote 'contact' between Looked After Children, their parents, relatives and other people who are important to them.

Family time is particularly important for children and young people who are at risk of losing their sense of identity with specific aspects of their cultural heritage. Children with dual heritage or who may be placed with carers who are not a cultural match, need to maintain their links with their family, friends and community so that their cultural history is encouraged and valued. The role of the child's Social Worker is essential in terms of providing foster carers with the necessary information about family time arrangements, including any assessment of risk for those involved.

The needs, thoughts and feelings of the children are also central to planning family time which should be co-ordinated by the child's Social Worker and includes consideration of frequency, location and the level of supervision required.

Research suggests that maintaining links between children and their families increases the possibility of reunification. Where this is not possible or appropriate, research also suggests that family time enhances a child's sense of identity as well as avoiding disruptions in fostering households. It is not unusual for children to ask to have family time with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with prior to being Looked After. This is often an expression of loss for children and positive steps should be taken to re-establish these relationships if it is appropriate for the child.

Family time does not have to be face to face and can take the form of phone calls, video calls, letters, photographs or cards from holidays and special occasions.

What happens if there are problems with family time? Experienced foster carers will know that family time can have its difficulties. In some circumstances it may be clear that family time will not benefit the child or may put them at risk. This is unusual; however, should it be the case, the court has the power to restrict family time that may not be in the child's best interests.

Family time may cause distress for children, and it is usually foster carers who have to deal with this when a child feels confused or disappointed. This can be emotionally difficult for foster carers who feel frustrated that the family are letting the child down, but there are many possible reasons why parents and family members find contact stressful. They may feel guilty or angry that their children are being looked after in foster care. Children often come into foster carer in an emergency when the family is experiencing overwhelming situations and loss of control in their lives.



Parents may feel angry that their children are living with foster carers if this is against their wishes and resent having to comply with plans they don't fully agree with. Parents and relatives can also worry that the carers will take their place in the child's life and affection and may have heard in the media about foster carers wanting to keep the children in their care. Parents may also feel they have failed their children which can impact on their motivation and reliability. These reasons and feelings can lead to parents behaving in ways which appear inappropriate when seeing their children. They may be very emotional, or may give the children unrealistic messages or promise gifts. Dealing with the situations that can result from spending time with birth family is often hard to manage, but understanding the birth family's experience can help to make sense of the situation for the child, as well as the family. Planning meetings involving the carers (prior to or shortly after any child moving to reside with a foster carer is made) can help parents deal with their fears and clarify how arrangements can work best for the child. Foster carers can also make invaluable contributions to the plans for children by recording the behaviours and emotional well-being of children before and after seeing family members. This may identify patterns that can contribute to decision making, which may otherwise go unnoticed. It is also important that any issues in relation to family time are discussed in formal supervision with your Supervising Social Worker so that situations can be identified, shared and hopefully resolved. When it is considered safe and appropriate, it may be beneficial for you to facilitate family time at your home or at an agreed venue. This can increase the child's sense of security when the people who are important to them are comfortable with each other, and it can also be less threatening for parents and other family members.

Finances

All foster carers receive a Fostering Allowance when they have a child in placement. Foster carer payments are paid into your bank or building society account four weekly in arrears. The level of payments is reviewed once a year. The fostering allowances are not taxable since they contain no element of reward.

Fostering Allowance

Below is a guideline in respect of how the fostering allowance should be used in respect of the daily needs of children and young people:

Age	Total allowance (from 01/10/2022)
0-4	£143.52
5-10	£159.60
11-15	£191.36
16+	£228.57

A guideline of how much of the allowance should be used in respect of the daily needs of the child:

Food	30-34%
Clothing	22-26%
Transport	7-11%
Personal	6-17%
Household	18-30%

The percentages for the various components of the fostering allowance differs due to the age bands of children and young people.

Whilst this provides a useful guide, it is not intended to be rigid. However, within the category of clothing, expenditure must be recorded in the child's log and verified in supervision. Pocket money must similarly be recorded and paid at the recommended rate in the policy (see below).

Fostering Allowances are payable for each night a child is in placement. Please check remittance advice notes and advise finance section urgently of over/under payment, as these must be rectified as soon as possible, and may cause disruption to your payments.

To ensure accuracy of payments, foster carers should confirm when children are placed or moved with their supervising social worker (or duty officer).

Automatic Entitlements

Birthday - automatically paid in the month before the child's birthday

Festive allowance - automatically paid in the month before Christmas. If the allowance is to be paid at any other time during the year a request must be submitted to Finance so it can be amended

Holidays/Recreation - A maximum of two weeks allowance per year (April to March) can be paid in respect of the child. Payment will only be made more than one month in advance of holiday dates where it is necessary to secure bookings. You should discuss this with your supervising social worker.

Consideration will be given to requests for payments to enable children to go on holidays abroad with the family. Funding will occasionally be made available to increase a child's holiday/recreation allowance to cover any flight/travel costs, only if the holiday is deemed to be of a significant benefit to a child or young person. Only actual costs can be considered and receipts or confirmation of payment details from travel agents must be submitted. Fostering allowances will continue to be paid and are expected to cover any other expenditure during holidays abroad.

Age	Birthday	Festive	Holiday
0-4	£106.31	£106.31	£143.52
5-10	£116.95	£116.95	£159.60
11-15	£159.47	£159.47	£191.36
16+	£191.36	£191.36	£228.57

School Activities - Fostering allowances are expected to cover school activities up to £30 per any one activity. In addition, one payment for a school educational trip per child can be paid out of the Fostering budget for the primary school, and one for the secondary school period. Requests need to be made through the supervising social worker.

Clothing payments

Initial Clothing Grants - An application may be made for an initial clothing grant, where a child has inadequate clothing on becoming Looked After and no clothes can be retrieved for him or her. The sum approved will depend on the needs of the child, but will not exceed £175. An application should normally be made within the first 6 weeks of a child's placement in foster care. Receipts or a record of clothes purchased are required.

School Uniform Grants - An equivalent system to the above will apply to school uniform grants. Only one grant will be made per child respectively for the infant school period, the junior school period and the secondary school period, unless the child moves placements, which also results in a change of school.

Maternity Clothes for young people who are pregnant - An equivalent system will also apply to maternity clothes where necessary and a payment not exceeding £100 per pregnancy may be approved.

Transport Costs

The fostering allowance is assumed to cover all travel costs incurred by the child taking part in everyday family activities and to cover short car journeys associated with the child's needs. Carers can claim additional costs to assist in school transport, to facilitate contact, to meet complex medical or other needs and to attend meetings, only, if the mileage is 4 miles return or more. This needs to be agreed with the Supervising Social Worker beforehand. The weekly fostering allowance should be used to purchase children's bus passes.

Other Discretionary payments

Young People Absent from Placement, incl. Admission to Hospital - If a child is absent from placement, due to an unauthorised absence or admission to hospital, the fostering allowance will cease. Any exception to this must be agreed by a manager within the Fostering Service.

Respite - If a child receives a respite service in foster care, fostering allowances will transfer to the respite carer on the day the child leaves their regular foster carer and transfer back the day they return.

Equipment - It is the responsibility of carers to provide appropriate furniture and other equipment for children and young people fostered, although an initial lump sum payment may be made at the approval stage, processed by the supervising social worker.

Child Care and Sessional Work Costs to Support Placements - In exceptional circumstances, nursery, play scheme and sessional work costs can be agreed by a Team Manager in the Fostering Service, where it can be demonstrated that this measure will significantly enhance the placement stability, or where the need arises as a result of service requirements. Where such arrangements are made to meet the specific needs of a child, the responsible Team Manager(s) can fund this. Where appropriate, childcare arrangements are made in negotiation with the child's social worker to cover the normal work patterns of a carer. This must be funded directly by the foster carer, unless the carer does not receive a fee payment. In this case, financial support may be agreed by the relevant Team Manager(s). Foster carers cannot be paid as Childminders unless they are appropriately registered to do so.

Ex-Gratia Payments and Claims for Damage - All foster carers are expected to inform their insurers (household, building, car) that they are caring for foster children. Carers are also expected to take reasonable precautions to avoid risk of damage to, or loss of their personal property as a result of fostering. However, uninsured losses/damage caused by a foster child may be considered for reimbursement where the carers' own insurance does not cover the damage. All claims under this category will normally require 2 estimates and a report must be presented to the Assistant Director for a decision.

Payments to Support Interests/Talents/Hobbies Financial assistance to support interests/talents/hobbies, which exceed the cost of £10 per week, can be applied for by the supervising social worker. Approval can then be given to meet the excess cost of such activities. Payments of up to £10 per week are expected to be covered by the fostering allowance.

Receipts of Gifts by Carers - Carers may occasionally be offered gifts, presents or other hospitality by birth family members or friends of the child they are caring for. All such gifts and hospitality should be viewed with caution, as acceptance may be misconstrued at a later stage. Prior to accepting any gifts or hospitality the carer must discuss the appropriateness of

this with their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. If a gift is accepted, a gifts and hospitality form must be submitted to a Team Manager, in the Fostering Service, who will make a recommendation to the Assistant Director, otherwise the gift must be refused or returned.

Queries regarding payments

Any questions arising should in the first place be dealt with by the relevant supervising social worker or Duty Office on 0300 555 2834.

Queries regarding payment details, should be made to Children's Services Finance Section on 01922 658323.

Fostering fee

Foster carers who have completed the "Skills to Foster" training (this will be most Mainstream carers and some Connected Person carers) will receive a Fostering fee.

Walsall Council does not deduct the tax at source and foster carers should make their own arrangements and seek advice from an independent accountant and Inland Revenue.

For further advice and help contact the following:

 www.gov.uk/becoming-foster-parent/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering

Foster carers cannot claim tax relief, child benefits, income support or free school meals for Looked After Children in their care. A child with a disability may be entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). This allowance is payable in addition to the fostering allowance. If you consider the child you are caring for is entitled to this benefit, discuss the matter with the child's Social Worker before approaching the DWP. DLA should be used to enhance the quality of life for a young person and foster carers need to keep accurate accounts of any expenditure.

Dinner Money

School dinner money or the cost of packed lunches should be paid from the child's allowance. Looked After Children placed with foster carers are not eligible for free school meals. Please inform the child's Social Worker if a child is receiving free schools meals when placed with you; you should also inform the school that the child is no longer eligible.



Pocket Money and Savings

Children and young people must receive pocket money and savings whilst they are in care, because part of their allowance accounts for this. Pocket money should be given to children and young people for their own use and not to pay for regular entertainment, clothes or personal toiletries, unless this has been agreed as part of the Placement Plan.

The amount of pocket money must be clarified at the start of a placement and discussed at the Placement Planning meeting. The amount arrived at must be compatible with the foster carers' birth children still living in the home and other foster children. It is not expected that pocket money is paid to children under the age of five. They can have occasional treats instead of pocket money. The table below is a guide to the minimum amounts each child or young person should receive. It is recommended that an increase in pocket money is linked to the child or young person's birthday to mark their increasing age.

The incremental changes increase after the age of 10 to take account of the child's increasing maturity.

Sometimes it will be appropriate to withhold pocket money for a short period, which should be appropriate to the misdemeanour. This should usually be for a short period of time for example a few hours but up to a maximum of four days. It can also be appropriate to confiscate up to two thirds of a child's pocket money in a single weekly episode for reparation. This should all be clearly recorded in the child's logs and the child's social worker and your supervising social worker informed.

Age	Weekly Minimum Amount	Reward Amount	Total
0-4 years	Occasional Treats		
5 years	£0.75	£0.25	£1.00
6 years	£1.00	£0.50	£1.50
7 years	£1.50	£0.50	£2.00
8 years	£1.75	£0.75	£2.50
9 years	£2.00	£1.00	£3.00
10 years	£2.50	£1.50	£4.00
11 years	£3.50	£1.50	£5.00
12 years	£4.00	£2.00	£6.00
13 years	£5.00	£2.00	£7.00
14 years	£6.00	£2.00	£8.00
15 years	£7.00	£2.00	£9.00
16 years	£8.00	£2.00	£10.00
17 years	£9.00	£2.00	£11.00

Most families put aside a sum of money on a regular basis for their children's future. Children in the care of the local authority would also benefit from money set aside for them, to enable them to start independent living with some savings.

Previously foster carers were expected to set aside savings, in a separate savings account. From April 2022 the plan is that the savings will be deducted at source from scheduled payments and paid into the child's Junior Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) or Child Trust Fund (CTF). If they do not yet have an account, the money will be held centrally until this happens.

The amount saved will be £5 per week for each child 0-4 years old, £6 per week for a child over 5-10 years old, £10 per week per child 11-15 years and £12 per week for a young person 16-17 years.

You should also set up a personal savings account for a young person, where they save for holidays, or put aside some pocket money whilst they save for a bigger purchase etc.

First Aid & Medication

Fostering households should have a basic first aid kit available to deal promptly with minor injuries. The Children's Workforce Development Unit run a Paediatric First Aid course and you should contact them to book yourself on to a course. It is an expectation and requirement of fostering standards that all carers undertake first aid training which needs to be renewed every 3 years.

When a child or young person is placed with you, the Placement Plan should indicate whether they have any medical needs and whether they are taking any medication. It is important that you are clear about what type of medicines they are using, what the dosage is, and when it should be administered. You should also be made aware of when the GP or hospital will be reviewing the medication. If you are in any doubt about this please discuss it with the child's Social Worker.

If a child becomes ill whilst in your care, you will need to use your judgement about whether to give the child non-prescribed medication. You must ensure that it is appropriate for their age and symptoms; if you are in any doubt, seek the advice of the health visitor, school nurse, GP or local pharmacist. It is not advisable to give children or young people aspirin unless it is specifically prescribed by a doctor. Carers are expected to complete records when they administer any medication or when there has been a medical incident i.e. hospital admission, consultant/GP appointment.

Safe storage of medication is essential, ideally in a locked cabinet out of sight and reach of children. Under no circumstances should medication or drugs be left in a place where children can get hold of them. This will be monitored through supervision and unannounced visits.

In order for a carer to accept responsibility to undertake procedures such as injections, administering rectal medication, tube feeding etc.

The following criteria should be met:

- The child's parent has given written consent
- The carer is willing to do the task
- The carer is instructed in the technique by a qualified nurse or doctor who is satisfied that the carer is competent to undertake the specific procedure.

It is perfectly acceptable for a nurse to train a foster carer to give medical treatment. The nurse has the responsibility of ensuring that the carer is competent, confident and willing to give the treatment. The carer should also be aware of any possible adverse reactions to the medication and the necessary steps to correct such an occurrence.

Any health related issues should always be reported to the child's Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker.

FLASH

The FLASH (Foster Carers, Looked After, Adoption Supporting Hub) offers consultation clinics to foster carers and other professionals involved in caring and planning for Looked After Children.

This would be a good service for you if you have concerns about a child, or if you want to think about the child's mental health/emotional needs. FLASH will provide a space to think about the child in a different way, and give you access to different professional views on the best way forward to support the child's needs.

It is also a space for newly approved foster carers to think about the role they will have in parenting children, and to consider how children having experienced trauma, may demonstrate some of that trauma in the home.

If you think this service would be of benefit to you, please discuss with your Supervising Social Worker. When attending an appointment please bring some history of the child's journey in order to make sense of what the difficulties might be.

Foster Care Agreement

When foster carers are approved they are required to enter into a written agreement that constitutes a statement of responsibilities, requirements and expectations of the partnership between Walsall Council and the carer.

The responsibilities of the foster carer are:

To give immediate written notice with full particulars to the Fostering Service of:

- Any intended change of address
- Any change in membership of your household
- Any change in your personal circumstances and any other events which affect your capacity to care for the child placed with you, or which affects the suitability of your household
- Any criminal convictions or cautions or criminal charges pending at any time following your approval as a foster carer, involving you or someone in your household.
- Any request or application by you, or any member of your household, to foster or adopt children or to become a registered childminder or day care provider.

You will also agree:

- Not to administer any form of physical punishment to a child placed with you. Advice is available from your Supervising Social Worker to help with alternative measures.
- To comply with the terms of any Care Plan or Placement Plan.
- To promote and safeguard the child's welfare having regard for long and short term arrangements for them.
- To notify the child's Social Worker and your Supervising Social Worker immediately of any serious illness or occurrence that affects the child/young person.



The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. It ensures that foster carers are recognised, valued and supported, and provides expert advice and information to its members. Part of the package of support provided to you by Walsall Council includes membership of The Fostering Network, www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk.

Here are the steps you need to take to initially access member-only content on The Fostering Network website:

1. Go to www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/user/register
2. Choose: Individual member. If you already receive e-newsletters from The Fostering Network then they already have your e-mail address on your member record and you can use that email to register on the website. If they do not have your email, or the email you wish to use does not match their records, you will be asked to provide further details on the following screen so they can verify you are a member of The Fostering Network.

The Fostering Teams

The Fostering Teams are based at Fallings Heath, Walsall Road, WS10 9SH (01922 652680). If you are a foster carer for Walsall, you will have a Supervising Social Worker who is a member of one of these teams.

Recruitment and Assessment Team

This team is responsible for all marketing, recruitment, preparation training and assessment activities for Mainstream foster carers. The team undertake the assessments of mainstream foster carers.

The team provides supervision and support to mainstream carers until their first review, which includes supporting them with the completion of the TSD standards and other core training.

The Support & Stability Team is also part of this team. See the section below about the Support & Stability Team for further details.

Connected Persons Team

This team is responsible for the assessment of prospective Connected Person carers and SGO assessments in accordance with court timescales and the implementation of care plans for children.

This team also provides services such as:

- Joint Initial Viability Assessments
- Supervising Connected Persons until permanency is achieved
- Supporting Connected Carers with completion of the TSD standards and other core training
- Skills to Foster training for Connected Carers
- Connected Carers and SGO Duty
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Step Parent Adoptions

Within this team we also provide post SGO support services for all Special Guardians within Walsall Council. The SGO support services offers an assessment of need which is completed and tailored to the needs of the child and families circumstances. This includes, practical support, support around contact, group support, parenting advice and financial support. The team also facilitates access to therapeutic work from other relevant agencies.

Support and Development Team 1

Following the first year of approval, mainstream carers transfer to the support and development team. Family and Friend foster carers are supported by this team from the point of their approval. Family and friend carers are offered the same supervision and support as mainstream carers and they are also given the same opportunity to attend training which also includes support with the completion of TSD standards and other core training. In line with the regulatory requirement to consider permanence at a child or young person's second statutory review of placement, the review will consider the child's need for permanence and a decision will be made regarding an SGO application and the timescales by which this should be pursued.

The team also undertake placement duty, some family finding for permanent placements, permanence assessments and they contribute to the training programme for foster carers.

Support and Development Team 2 - Mockingbird

This team has similar responsibilities to the "Support and Development Team 1", and also operates the Mockingbird extended family model.

Mockingbird is a 'community', made up of foster carers who support one another to care for children. There is a Hub carer, supporting around 8 other fostering households each known as satellites, collectively they are known as 'constellations'. Each constellation has a liaison worker from the Mockingbird Fostering Team that supervise the hub carers. The Liaison worker is involved in many of the constellation events and builds a strong relationship with the carers and children. Walsall has 3 established constellations and is developing 3 more. Please see section below about Mockingbird, if you require further information.

Hair Care

This can be a delicate area and carers will be expected to use their judgement, experience and discretion. It is good practice when you are considering changing the hairstyle of a child, to check with your Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker that this would not create undue distress to the child's birth parents or family.

Carers of black children should be knowledgeable and competent to take appropriate care of all their physical needs.

This will include having information about appropriate hairdressers and barbers. Hairdressers and chemists can advise on a variety of appropriate products available for skin and hair care.

Hair Care for Young People of African/Caribbean Descent

Keep hair and scalp clean, wash hair weekly but remember that excessive washing will dry out natural oils, causing hair to become dull looking. Hair and scalp should be oiled moderately. Dry hair becomes brittle and would normally break due to lack of oiling. Combing will help to distribute natural oils evenly through the strands of hair. Oil should be applied generously after washing, but as required every one or two days after washing. Although oil should be applied generously it is more useful if hair is parted into two or four parts and then cream or oil applied to each part individually.

Tightly curled African hair will become unmanageable if it is not properly combed through regularly. Plaiting, as well as proper diet, and adequate oiling and washing, helps to keep hair in good condition and maintain growth.

Plaiting at night will allow the hair to remain manageable for the next morning. When washing hair use a shampoo which leaves the hair moist and comb hair through thoroughly before and after each washing. It is often better to use a shampoo which contains conditioner. If using a hair dryer after washing do not use a very hot temperature to dry hair.

www.afrodeity.co.uk/2013/01/afro-kids-hair-detangling-swimming-nits.html



Health Care Assessments and Medical Issues

A child placed in foster care should have a Health Care Assessment before their first review. The Health Care Assessment will be arranged by the child's Social Worker, who should liaise with the foster carer about this. The first Health Care Assessment must be conducted by a registered medical practitioner. Subsequent assessments may be carried out by a registered nurse or registered midwife under the supervision of a registered medical practitioner, who should provide the Social Worker with a written report.

The health professional conducting the assessment will complete a relevant form and a Health Plan, which should be passed to the child's Social Worker, who should give copies to the foster carer.

For children under five years, further Health Care Assessments should occur at least once every six months; for children aged over five years, further Health Care Assessments should occur at least annually.

It is part of the child's Social Worker's role to ensure that consents and permissions with regard to delegated authorities are obtained to avoid any delay. Foster carers should refer to the delegated authority checklist to see what has been delegated to them.

In most cases foster carers are expected to organise non-emergency health appointments, including dentists and opticians, with the permission of the person with parental responsibility. If the child requires emergency treatment foster carers should make the necessary arrangements and then contact the child's Social Worker (or out of hours the Emergency Response Team). If the treatment is urgent the attending doctors will generally treat the child first and then afterwards deal with the issue of consent.

It is good practice for foster carers to record any medication the child is taking whether it is prescribed by the child's GP or not. When a child arrives at a foster carer's home for the first time they should find out from the child's Social Worker if the child is taking any medication, what it is, when it is taken and how often, if the child suffers from any allergies etc.

Holidays and Passports

It is expected that any child/young person placed with foster carers would be treated as a member of the carer's family and they would be included in family holidays. To help in this a holiday allowance is provided.

However, in some circumstances permission is required before a child/young person can be away from the foster carer's address overnight, even if they are accompanied by the foster carers. This could include school trips.

Therefore, before foster carers make any arrangements they should contact the child's Social Worker to discuss their plans. Children should not be taken out of school in term time for holidays.

Holidays Abroad

If foster carers are thinking of taking a holiday abroad with a foster child, the carer must give the child's Social Worker plenty of notice of their plans.

The particular legal status of the child can have an effect on whether it is possible for a child to leave the country. There may also be other reasons why a holiday abroad might not be in the best interests of the child.

Passports

Obtaining a passport is a lengthy process, as is obtaining the permissions and agreements required by the law. Therefore, please make sure that you inform the child's Social Worker in plenty of time in order to avoid any disappointment.

Children's Services will pay the cost of the child's passport. A letter of delegated consent will also be needed when taking a foster child outside of the UK. Do not be put off by this list of apparent difficulties. Many carers and the children placed with them have wonderful holidays abroad, but, like most holidays, make sure you make your arrangements in plenty of time.

Immunisations

Children placed with foster carers must not be given inoculations without prior consultations with the child's Social worker.

Insurance

Foster carers should ensure that they have sufficient car and household insurance and that their policies recognise their status as foster carers.



Leaving Care - see section on Transition and Leaving Care

Medical Issues - see section on Health Care Assessments and Medical Issues

Mockingbird

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme aims to improve the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

How it works

The Mockingbird programme creates a 'constellation' where one experienced foster home offers planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training and nearly 24/7 support to six to ten 'satellite' fostering families.

Relationships are central to the programme. The hub home carer builds strong professional relationships with their fostering service and with the support of their liaison worker is able to work proactively to prevent problems escalating or to offer crisis support to avoid placement breakdowns. The hub home carer can also build and support sibling relationships by offering a space for young people who cannot live together to spend family time together.



Through monthly constellation meetings and social activities Mockingbird develops a supportive community, like an extended family. This diverse community offers a more positive experience of care providing children and young people with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed while offering supportive peer relationships for foster carers and sons and daughters of fostering families.

Walsall's Vision for Mockingbird and how it will become part of Walsall's Fostering offer.

Our vision is for all fostered children and young people to experience love, care, support and stability. Programmes do not create nurturing homes, dedicated adults do. Systems don't raise children, families and communities do. Institutions don't change lives, relationships do.

Mockingbird is an innovative way of delivering foster care with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanence for children and young people in care, and to improve support for and retention of, foster carers.

Mockingbird centres on the idea of an extended network of family support, empowering families to support each other and overcome challenges before they escalate, and to offer children and young people a more positive, consistent, and secure experience of care.

Community, connectedness, continuity of care, consistency, relationship building are all foundational to the vision of Mockingbird. Inspiring our children, young people and carers to love, learn and live together as part of a local community.

If you are a foster carer who is interested in being part of Mockingbird, please discuss with your supervising social worker.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services are an integral part of the legal framework in which the fostering provision is regulated and conducted under the Care Standards Act 2000. Revised regulations and National Minimum Standards were introduced in April 2011. The new regulations reinforce giving more flexibility to foster carers in the everyday caring tasks for children and young people.

 www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education. During the inspection of Children's Services foster carers may receive questionnaires to complete. Some foster carers will have the opportunity to meet with the inspectors. To find out more about Ofsted, inspections and how you can contact Ofsted, please use the following link.

 www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

Out of Hours Support Line

Sometimes carers may need support or advice on certain issues related to fostering such as questions about a child's behaviour or about what to do in a certain scenario but your Supervising Social Worker has finished for the day. Sometimes you may just need to offload.

As part of our plans to strengthen the support for you, Walsall Fostering Service have introduced an Out of Hours Support Line.

The service operates from 17:30 to 8:45 the following day and operates 24 hours at weekends and bank holidays. It will be operated by staff from the fostering service and in due course some in-house foster carers.

The Out of Hours number is **01922 662280**

Please note it is not an emergency service. All emergency calls are to go to EDT (see "Emergencies" section earlier in the handbook).

Passports - see section on Holidays and Passports

Pathway Plan - see section Transition and Leaving Care

Placement Plans and Placement Planning Meetings

Before a placement commences or within 5 days of it starting a Placement Planning Meeting will take place to draw up the Placement Plan. Usually the child's Social Worker, your Supervising Social Worker (although it may be a duty Social Worker), the child, sometimes their parents and yourselves will attend. Everyone involved in these meetings contributes to the drawing up of the plan.

The Placement Plan sets out the agreed arrangements for the care of the child. It also serves as a confirmation of what is expected from foster carers and Children's Services and what has been agreed with the child's parent(s). Different requirements may apply when a child is placed in an emergency. The Placement Plan is a live document, which will be reviewed alongside the Care/Pathway Plan on a regular basis, and at a minimum, at the time of every LAC review. Delegated authority is an integral part of the Placement Plan.

The Placement Plan will cover essential information necessary to care for the child; **this will include:**

- The arrangements for the child
- The objectives of the placement
- The child's personal history, religion, cultural and linguistic background and racial origin
- The child's state of health and any need for health care and supervision
- The child's educational needs
- Arrangements for the financial support of the child during the placement
- Arrangements for delegating medical consent for examination and treatment of the child
- The arrangements of the Social Worker visits and reviews of the child's progress
- The arrangements for the child to have contact with parents and others
- Compliance by the foster carer with the terms of the Placement Plan and the carer's cooperation with any arrangements made by the responsible authority for the child
- Delegated Authority

 www.walsallchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_del_auth.html?zoom_highlight=delegated+authority

 www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/delegated-authority

Placement Support Meetings and Disruption Meetings

Placement Support Meetings

Placement Support Meetings between the foster carer, the Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker should be regarded as routine good practice. These ad hoc meetings are separate from the routine supervision meetings held between the foster carer and the Supervising Social Worker and can be convened, for example, in response to the need to clarify a child's ongoing needs or to focus on individual work with the child in the foster home.

However, when a placement is identified as approaching an unplanned ending or a point of crisis, a more formal Placement Support Meeting will be required; these meetings should be chaired by a Team Manager or Senior Practitioner.

The purpose of a Placement Support Meeting is to:

- Identify the current and future support needs of the placement
- Plan how these will be met
- Monitor and evaluate the provision of support

Placement Support Meetings are likely to be particularly useful:

- When a long term foster placement is planned. Experience shows that a proactive approach in planning these placements and anticipating support needs greatly increases the chances of such placements being successful and not breaking down
- When a placement is at risk of breaking down (i.e. disrupting, but prior to a crisis point), a Placement Support Meeting can help analyse the issues that threaten the placement's stability and produce a plan of action to address these

Disruption Meetings

Disruption Meetings have a similar function and agenda to Placement Support Meetings with the following differences:

- They should be convened when placements are at or close to breakdown which the Placement Support meeting has not succeeded in addressing

- Whilst still endeavouring to prevent breakdown, where this is judged to be inevitable, the meeting should help to plan this in a way which minimises the impact of a placement move upon the child
- The meeting will also aim to identify lessons for future practice, whilst also highlighting service learning and any gaps in service provision.

A disruption is likely to be upsetting for you and your family but you should continue to work in partnership with the child and social workers to achieve a satisfactory and stable move for the child. This may take a number of weeks but try to stay positive and sensitive to how the child may be feeling. You will need to share information about the child's likes and dislikes with his or her new carer and ensure that their belongings, including those accumulated throughout the placement, are packed in appropriate luggage (and never in bin bags or carrier bags).

It is recommended that the more formal Placement Support and Disruption Meetings will take place where an agreed permanent foster placement is near to breaking down, or has ended; this includes all Connected Persons foster placements. For temporary placements it is suggested that placements in excess of six months duration will warrant a formal Placement Support Meeting and/or Disruption Meeting. Meetings are not about apportioning blame but are an opportunity to examine whether the placement was appropriate and what can be done to avoid further disruptions in the future.

Pocket Money -
see section on Finances

Recording

There is an expectation that foster carers will keep a record of each child placed. Regular entries should be made on the diary sheets of significant events. These will be checked by your supervising social worker and should be passed on to the child's social worker so that they can be added to the child's electronic file. Please discuss with your supervising social worker if you are unsure of the frequency and content of what you should record.

Carers should also prepare memory boxes for all children who live with them that they can take with them when they leave.

Recruitment

Walsall Fostering Service is committed to the continued recruitment of foster carers. Foster carers can play an important role in the recruitment of other foster carers. Foster carers are encouraged to take part in recruitment campaigns.

They are involved in preparation groups and training of new foster carers.

If you know somebody who may be interested in becoming a foster carer, the Fostering Service will be happy to speak to them.

Respite

Walsall Fostering Service takes the view that stability for children must and should be our primary objective. In order to promote and support ongoing stability and to help normalise children's lives, time away from their foster home through the use of respite care should be avoided wherever possible. However, we also recognise that foster carers are professionals that undertake a challenging role and require support to promote stable and secure placements. Foster carers often have a support network, made up of friends and family, that they use to help them foster; they may provide babysitting, childminding, occasional breaks away from a child or young person and emergency assistance (under delegated authority).

Requests for a child to be placed in respite care must be put in writing by the foster carer and discussed with their Supervising Social Worker at least 28 days prior to the respite period, clearly outlining the reasons for this request. All requests must ensure that the child's needs remain paramount. The foster carer will have explored with their support network whether the child can remain within the extended family in the first instance under the permissions given under Delegated Authority. The Supervising Social Worker will discuss the request with the child's Social Worker and discuss the request with a Team Manager in the Fostering Service within 5 days of the request. It will be at the discretion of the Team Manager or Group Manager whether this request is agreed.

For more details about the Respite Policy, please discuss with your Supervising Social Worker.

Review - Foster Carer's

Review (often called "The Annual Review")

All approved foster carers should have their approval reviewed annually. The main purpose of the Review is to assess whether the carers and their household are still suitable to foster. Chaired by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) or a Fostering Manager, reviews should also be completed every time there is a considerable change in the foster carer's circumstances. Reviews can be held more frequently if there are concerns or significant changes in a foster carer's circumstances.

The carer's Supervising Social Worker should make an appointment to visit the carer's home and ensure that the carers are aware that the Review is to take place and all the necessary participants can be present. If any authority other than Walsall has placed a child with or has used the foster home within the previous 12 months they must be invited to contribute to the Review.

A foster carer's Review is an opportunity for the carer to discuss any issues which may be of concern to them or to celebrate achievements that may have occurred over the last year.

Prior to the Review, foster carers should think carefully about the issues they would wish to raise. It is an opportunity to comment upon the support received from the Fostering Service and the child's Social Worker. Carers can also discuss their approval status and any changes to their Matching Preference.

The Review will take into account the views of the foster carers; these should be put in writing before the review takes place. The views of the Looked After Child will be sought by the child's Social Worker and will form part of this review. In addition, the Supervising Social Worker will complete a report for the purposes of the Review, alongside requests for written feedback from the child's Social Worker, and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer. Furthermore, foster carers own family members are welcomed to contribute to this Review in writing, i.e. their own children and others who visit the fostering household on a regular basis.

The contents of the Review will be recorded and the foster carers will be notified of any decisions taken. If it is decided that the foster carers are no longer suitable it will be discussed with the carers

and the reasons for terminating the agreement will be explained. Where there is a disagreement a representation procedure is available.

First reviews, will be presented to the Fostering Panel, as will reviews recommending a change of approval, and where there has been significant change. Reviews will also be presented to panel every 3 years. Foster carers are expected to attend when their review is considered by Fostering Panel.

Review - Looked After Children's Review

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to draw up plans in writing, for each child they accommodate. The child's Review is part of a continuing planning process. Chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), the Review is an opportunity to examine plans and decisions and assess the progress made in implementing plans; it also sets goals for future action. If a child who is placed is of sufficient understanding, they should take part in the Review should they wish, along with the child's birth parents, the foster carers, school teachers, the child's Social Worker and any other person or professional who has significant involvement with the child. When arrangements are being made to hold the Review, foster carers should ensure that their own Supervising Social Worker is aware that a Review is being planned, so that they too can attend if required. The Review should seek a wide range of views on all aspects of the child's welfare, health and education needs, etc. The contents of the Review are recorded in writing. The first Review should take place within four weeks of the commencement of the placement. It should be followed by a second Review within three months. Thereafter Reviews should take place at six monthly intervals. This is a minimum requirement, a Review may be held whenever it is considered necessary. The Review should be held in a place which is most likely to provide a relaxed atmosphere for all participants, particularly the child.

Savings - see section on Finances

Smoking

Walsall Council operates a 'no smoking' policy in all its workplaces and buildings and Council employees are prohibited from smoking on Council property.

Only 15% of the smoke from a cigarette is inhaled by the smoker, the rest goes into the surrounding air and other people breathe it in. Passive smoking is breathing in other people's tobacco smoke. If you have a health problem, such as asthma, chronic bronchitis or certain allergies, passive smoking can make it worse. Babies and children who cannot avoid smoke where they live and play are at particular risk. Babies whose parents smoke are much more likely to be taken to hospital with chest trouble in their first year of life than non-smokers' children.

Children with a parent who smokes have more chest, ear, nose and throat infections than non-smokers' children. In addition, the more cigarettes smoked at home, the greater the risk to the child. Children exposed to smoke are more likely to develop breathing problems as adults.

 www.proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/8532/policy-on-smoking-for-foster-carers-adopters-children-and-young-people-in-care.pdf

Social Media

It is recognised that foster carers make use of social media in a personal capacity. Please check your privacy settings so that your address and personal details are not accessible to members of the public.

Please be aware that even in private accounts what we share can often be seen by colleagues and other professionals - current and past that you are friends with or who follow you. This means that we should not be posting any content that includes discussion about particular people or things that have happened, and again care should be taken in sharing memes, jokes and images. Please consider before hitting post or send who may see what you are sharing and how this might be received.

Any communications that a foster carer makes in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- bring the organisation into disrepute, for example by criticising or arguing with families, social workers, management;
- breach confidentiality, for example by revealing details and issues relating to children, families, workers;

- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, by making offensive or defamatory or derogatory comments or posting offensive images of links to such content

Staying Put - see section Transition and Leaving Care

Staying Safe Online

You don't need to be an expert on the internet to help your fostered child to stay safe online. Follow the links below to find advice on how to help a child use the internet safely, responsibly and positively.

 www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/staying-safe-online/

 www.saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers

Support & Stability Team

The Support & Stability Team is underpinned by DDP, which is a therapy, parenting approach and model for practice that uses what we know about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and their caregivers with their relationships. Foster carers will be supported to parent with an attitude of PACE, which stands for Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy, and is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe, build resilience and learn to trust. Using PACE enables the adult to see the strengths and positive features that lie underneath more negative and challenging behaviour.

The Support & Stability Team will work and support in two areas:

1. Children living with Walsall foster carers where there is a risk of disruption and breakdown

This work will consist of approximately 12 weeks of support, working directly with the child/young person and/or their foster carers if required. The aim of this work is to bring some stability to the home and prevent a breakdown, so we want to receive referrals prior to the situation escalating to the point of crisis.

2. Supporting children and young people transitioning from Children's Homes and foster carers with an Independent Fostering Agency into internal foster homes.

The Support & Stability Team will work with children and young people in children's homes with a plan to transition into foster care, and with children and young people living with IFA foster carers.

A worker from the team will work with these children/young people to initially build a relationship prior to preparing the child/young person for the transition. It is anticipated that the support and stability team will be part of the matching process, transition planning and introductions, and the allocated worker will continue to provide support to the young person for a period of time following the move to their new home and to their foster carers if they move to a Walsall foster carer.

If you require the input of the Support and Stability Team, please discuss with your supervising social worker.

Support Group for foster carers

The support group meets once per month; it is available to all carers. This is an opportunity to ask questions seek support and help. We have speakers regularly attend on a variety of topics.

We are currently operating these on TEAMS but in the future we hope to meet up at a venue yet to be confirmed.

Our health colleagues also want to be part of this support to you and where possible a district nurse will also be in attendance.

We have a regular group that meet to develop our training for foster carers; if you are interested in joining please let your supervising social worker know.

Training

Walsall Council is committed to offering an extensive training programme for foster carers. Your Personal Development Plan will highlight areas of development for you and will be reviewed every year as part of your Annual Review. To register with the training hub please send your full name and email address to the Workforce Training Team who will create your learning account.

PracticeDevelopmentHub@walsall.gov.uk

Registered users have access to over 3000 mandatory and specialist online courses.

Some of the features the online courses include are:

- Assessments
- Course handbooks
- Certificates
- Notifications
- Free technical support
- Live chat

Mandatory training

You will find in the hub training 31 core training courses these will equip you with the basic necessary skills for you to be a foster carer.

In the main section the following courses can be found, they are:

- Equality and diversity
- Fire safety
- First aid
- Food safety and hygiene
- GDPR
- Mandatory handling
- Mediation foundation
- Risk management
- Safeguarding children (foundation and advanced)
- Self-harming behaviours
- Reporting and recording
- Moving forward with delegated authority
- Under managing allegations, you will also find complaints and allegations.

You will see on the dashboard the heading "Foster care training introduction to foster/England" this has 6 course modules.

Payments to foster carers will be covered in the Skills to foster training.

The Fostering Network of which you are a member of has information on TAX returns.

An additional 18 week training course is provided by the Fostering Service on Nurturing Attachments which will cover elements of PACE. There will also be a 6 week Foundations for Attachments course.

If your first language is not English please do contact Workforce Training to help you set up your PC to enable learning in the language you are most able to understand.

Any queries, please contact the Workforce Training Team PracticeDevelopmentHub@walsall.gov.uk

TSD standards

Following your initial approval as a foster carer, you must demonstrate that you meet the required Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers by collecting evidence directly related to your caring of the child you are looking after and completing a corresponding workbook within 12 months (or 18 months for Connected Person Carers).

www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook

Transition and Leaving Care

The Leaving Care Act sets out the criteria for a young person's eligibility for a leaving care service; they have to have been looked after for a minimum of 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 and still be in care when they are 16 or come back into care after they are 16.

Looked After Children continue to have a social worker in the LAC service until they are 18. At 18 responsibility for the young person transfers to the Transition and Leaving Care Service (TLC); the LAC teams and TLC are based at The TLC hub and can be contacted on 01922 650555.

A young person will be allocated a Personal Advisor (PA) when they are 17, the PA will support the young person's voice being heard and support the team around the young person to complete the Pathway Plan. The Pathway Plan replaces the LAC care plan and has to be in place by the time the young person reaches 16 years and 3 months. The plan is similar to a care plan with additional sections covering, education, training and employment, finances and accommodation. The young person will be provided with a copy of their Pathway Plan and you will receive a copy if the young person agrees.

Making the transition to independence is a testing time for young people and they need a lot of support. Hopefully they will have been gradually working towards independence and will have some knowledge and skills to draw from. As with any child or young person, ideally they develop

independence skills over time, they may start with being able to make a snack and then a meal, use their pocket money to buy items and then learn about budgeting. A vital role of the foster carer is to be actively involved and support them in their pathway to independence. Moving on is a very emotional time and it is helpful if you can provide more time and support.

Accommodation options for young people include "Staying Put"; this is when the young person remains with the foster carer post 18 under a Staying Put agreement; for further information about Staying Put please discuss with your Supervising Social Worker.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above

Other accommodation options include supported accommodation or shared tenancies. It is unlikely that the young person would receive a one bedroom property through social housing.

At 18 years of age statutory responsibilities cease and the young person no longer has a looked after status. The role of the PA is then to support and advise the young person, to walk alongside them and enable them to access resources in the community. The PA will contact the young person at 8 weekly intervals unless otherwise requested by the young person; the PA will review the Pathway Plan with the young person.

The PA is involved until the young person is 21 although this may continue until they are 25.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/support-care-leavers>





Call: 0800 923 3706

E-mail: fosteringinwalsall@walsall.gov.uk

Visit: www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk

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