

# Foster Care Guide Book



**January 2019**



## Useful Telephone Numbers:

You can use this page to save useful phone numbers or email addresses

- Fostering and Adoption Service Duty – 01620 82 7643
- Children's Services Contact Centre – 01875 82 4309
- Emergency Care Service – 0800 7316969
- Police (non-emergency) 101

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## Registration and Inspection of Fostering Services

East Lothian's Fostering Service complies with the National Care Standards for Foster Care and Family Placement Services. These Standards cover:

- Recruiting, selecting, approving, training, monitoring and supporting foster carers;
- The care of young people who live with foster carers;
- The work of the fostering panel.

The Care Standards are available on line and can be accessed at the following link:

[www.nationalcarestandards.org/files/foster-care.pdf](http://www.nationalcarestandards.org/files/foster-care.pdf)

### The Care Inspectorate

The Care Inspectorate regularly inspects Fostering Services to help ensure quality and standards are maintained. You may be invited to meet with them to help evaluate East Lothian's Fostering Service.

Children/young people have the right to make a complaint directly to the Care Inspectorate. Foster Carers can also contact them directly if you have any concerns about the service or our practice as an agency.

More information about the Care Inspectorate can be found at:

[www.careinspection.com](http://www.careinspection.com)

### The Emergency Care Service- 0800 731 6969

**The Emergency Care Service (ECS)** provides an out-of-hours emergency service. The service is based in Edinburgh and covers Midlothian, East Lothian and the City of Edinburgh. Sometimes children need to be placed with foster carers during weekends, holiday periods or outwith office hours. The ECS also responds to foster carers who are facing emergency situations. This is likely to be limited to providing advice over the telephone to help try to resolve matters. The limited number of staff on shift and the large geographical area covered means that the service can rarely respond to requests for a social worker to visit.

**If you have a serious concern about the safety of a child or young person, or if they pose a serious risk to others, you should consult the Police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.**

## Caring for children in East Lothian

At any one time, over 200 infants, children and young people in East Lothian need to be cared for away from their own families. A few with particularly complex needs require to be looked after in a residential setting, while others live with relatives or family friends in a kinship care arrangement. The majority need the security and stability that comes from living as part of a foster family.

Children of all ages, from babies to teens, need foster care – some for a few days, others for several years. Fostering can be highly rewarding but it is also a complex task. Absorbing someone else's child into your family is life changing in wonderful and challenging ways.

Children who are fostered can suffer from an acute sense of loss at being separated from their families. They may be bewildered and frightened by the experience of having to leave home. Many will have had poor experiences of being parented. Foster carers need to understand these issues and work skilfully and patiently with children to help them manage powerful emotions about their circumstances, their family and their history. The care you provide, however, can help children develop lifelong skills.

The East Lothian Fostering Team are here to help, through providing access to the wealth of experience in our team, through regular training and through meeting other foster carers to share ideas, knowledge and expertise. Each fostering household has their own supervising social worker to provide support and guidance.

Foster carers work with the young person's family, social workers, teachers, health workers and other professionals to ensure that the needs of young person in their care are met as fully as possible. If fostering full time, one carer needs to be 'at home' full time (i.e. have no other job/education) so he or she can respond to the changing needs of the young person.

All foster carers attend an initial training programme and are expected to maintain a commitment to ongoing training and development throughout their fostering career.

The Fostering Network Association also provides independent support and advice and all foster carers registered by East Lothian are provided with membership. We will also provide a number of Fostering Network books and journals as your fostering career progresses.

# **Section 1**

## **The Legal Basis of Caring for Children**

## Section 1 - The legal basis of caring for children

This section sets out the various legal conditions that may apply when a child is in foster care. The correct legal term for when a child is fostered is 'Looked After and Accommodated or 'LAAC'. You may occasionally still hear outdated terms such as 'in care'.

The normal legal arrangements for the placing of children with foster carer are contained in:

- The Children (Scotland) Act, 1995
- The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- The Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

The legal basis of the child's placement with you should be made clear and be detailed in the Child's Plan. Whatever legal way the young person is placed with you, please ensure that you get a copy of the necessary paperwork or order.

### **1.1 Voluntary Accommodation- Section 25 (1995 Act)**

This arrangement is made either at the request of parents or because a child is abandoned, or otherwise has no one to care for him/her. It is sometimes called 'voluntary accommodation'. If the parent asks for the child's return then this cannot be prevented unless Children's Services successfully apply for a legal order to prevent this in one of the ways described below. If the child has been accommodated for more than 6 months then the parent must give 14 days' notice that they wish the child to be returned.

### **1.2 Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) - Section 83 (2011 Act)**

The child is subject to compulsory measures of supervision. The Order can only be made through a Children's Hearing and can contain a condition that the child must reside with foster carers. The Order may contain other conditions, including arrangements to ensure or restrict contact with parents. Parents cannot remove the child from the foster carer unless a Children's Hearing agrees to this. Unless there is an early review, a CSO will last for 12 months.

### **1.3 Interim Compulsory Supervision Order (ICSO) - Section 86 (2011 Act)**

This is made by a Children's Hearing when the Panel decides that the child should be in a place of safety immediately. This order is time limited.

### **1.4 Child Protection Order (CPO) - Section 37 (2011 Act)**

This order is made by a Sheriff, who has to be satisfied that the child is at risk of immediate harm and needs to be cared for elsewhere. A CPO is an emergency measure which must be reviewed at a Children's Hearing within 2 working days.

### **1.5 Permanence Order - Section 80 (2007 Act)**

A Local Authority can apply for a Permanence Order when they believe a child will not or should not return to their family. This order is granted by a Sheriff Court and transfers some or all parental rights and responsibilities to the Local Authority. The child's parents may (or may not) retain some rights and responsibilities (such as the right to have contact with the child) but the Local Authority will have the right to determine where, and with whom, the child lives. Foster carers may also be given certain rights and responsibilities to enable them to make day to day arrangements for the child.

### **1.6 Refuge -Section 38 - (2011 Act)**

Children can seek a place or refuge if they are fleeing violence or at risk of violence. Occasionally, foster carers are asked to provide this refuge.



## **Section 2**

**Who does what  
when children are  
looked after?**

## **Section 2. Who does what when children are looked after?**

This section describes the various roles of individuals and agencies involved in planning for children.

### **2.1 The Local Authority**

Once a young person has become Looked After or Looked After and Accommodated the Local Authority (the Council) has a number of legal duties toward him or her, including to:

- Safeguard and promote the Child's Welfare (of paramount concern)
- Plan for the child and review this plan regularly

The Local Authority must ensure that:

- The child has access to services they need.
- Contact with the child's birth family is promoted (unless it is unsafe to do so).
- Siblings are kept together wherever possible.
- The child's cultural or religious persuasion, racial background and language are considered.
- The child's views and the parents' views are taken into consideration when making decisions.
- Advice and assistance is provided when the child is no longer looked after.

Each Local Authority is also a registered Fostering Agency and has duties and responsibilities in respect of recruiting and supporting, training and monitoring foster carers.

### **2.2 Children's Services**

Children's Services is the section within the Local Authority with the lead responsibility for planning for vulnerable children and families in need. You may occasionally hear the Local Authority Children's Services described as "The Department" but that is an outdated term that ceased to apply when the Children's Act Scotland 1995 came into force.

Children's Services staff work in close partnership with other professional agencies with a responsibility for young people, such as Health and Education. East Lothian's Fostering and Adoption Services are part of East Lothian's Children's Services.

### **2.3 Foster Carers**

Foster carers have a key role in helping the Local Authority meet their duties. (See also section 6, which covers the day to day role of foster carers in more detail).

Foster carers look after young people on behalf of the Local Authority and make the day-to-day decisions needed. The child's social worker must be consulted about wider decisions.

A 'Child's Plan' is drawn up at the start of a placement and reviewed regularly. The plan includes actions in relation to the child's development, education and health, helping the child attend specialist services, contact with birth family and so on. *It is important that foster carers do not do anything that is in conflict with the plan.*

The principal carer, must be at home full time (not in other paid employment) in order to be able to respond to the changing needs of the child or young person. Only in *exceptional* circumstances, and with prior agreement, may carers combine full time fostering with other paid employment. Examples of exceptional circumstances might include where a child is settled in a permanent placement *and*

- there are reliable arrangements in place to manage the child's activity and contact needs, after school and school holidays, sickness and other crisis events, *and*
- the carer can evidence capacity to meet the statutory demands required of a foster carer, such as attendance at support meetings, reviews and training.

## **2.4 The Child's Social Worker**

The child's social worker is responsible for initiating the Child's Plan, supporting its implementation and promoting the child's welfare and development. This involves working with parents to plan towards the child's return home (if possible), making an assessment of the child's needs and the family's circumstances and sometimes making long-term plans for the child's care away from home.

Social workers work directly with children to help them understand what is happening, adjust to the changes in their lives and prepare for the future. Foster carers are closely involved in these tasks but the social worker will also meet with the child alone. The child's social worker will ensure that statutory requirements for the child's care and protection are met and will organise and coordinate specialist support if needed.

Foster carers meet with the child's social worker in a range of formal meetings such as Reviews and Hearings and can also expect regular phone calls and visits to discuss the child's progress and needs. If the social worker cannot be contacted, the team leader or duty worker should be approached. Occasionally, the child's social worker is based in a different Local Authority because East Lothian has provided the fostering placement but is not legally responsible for the child.

## **2.5 The Supervising Social Worker**

All foster carers have a supervising social worker who is responsible for monitoring the standard of care provided and helping carers to further develop their skills. Supervising social workers can also provide practical support, including items of equipment. They ensure that Foster Carer Reviews are held as legally required, monitor that the range of approval is still appropriate and ensure that carer payments are authorised. They attend some children's meetings, such as the child's LAAC review, particularly if you consider you need support, and advocate for you or your family when needed. The supervising social worker will ensure you have access to the necessary support if you are experiencing difficulties. If your supervising social worker is not available the team leader or the duty worker (Fostering and Adoption Service) can be contacted.

Your supervising social worker will visit on a regular basis and there will be at least one unannounced visit each year.

Any issues and problems should be raised with your supervising social worker in the first instance. He or she will help you to resolve matters by talking them over, providing you with background reading, arranging personal training or referring to other specialist services.

Carers and supervising social workers work in partnership and should feel able to trust each other, communicate well and talk honestly about the impact and stresses of fostering as well as the positive aspects. The supervising social worker keeps a record of each visit including any support or training needs expressed and a copy is retained on your records. You will also receive a copy (which you will have signed) for your own records.

## **2.6 The Reporter**

The Reporter works for the Scottish Reporter's Administration (SCRA) and is usually a trained lawyer or an experienced social worker. It is his or her job to decide whether there are sufficient legal grounds to refer the child to a Children's Hearing. If the child's parents do not accept the grounds the matter must be referred to a Sheriff.

## **2.7 The Children's Hearing/ Children's Panel:**

The Children's Hearing Scotland System, through the Children's Panel, is responsible for making legal decisions about children and young people when compulsory measures of care are being considered. A Children's Panel is made up of trained volunteers who are interested in helping children. There are three Panel Members at every Hearing. The Reporter also attends but does not make any decisions at the Hearing.

The Children's Panel has a range of legal powers, including requiring that a child or young person is accommodated with foster carers. If a Children's Panel make an Order (at a Children's Hearing) naming you as the young

persons' place of residence then you must attend any future Children's Hearings to review the child's plan.

## **2.8 The Sheriff**

The Sheriff is the Scottish equivalent of a Judge. The Sheriff decides if there are grounds for a Children's Hearing to take place, hears appeals concerning Children's Panel Hearing decisions and makes decisions about children in permanence and adoption cases.

## **2.9 Other Supporting Agencies**

Children and their families are supported by a range of professionals from other agencies such as Health, Mental Health (CAMHS), Education/ Children's Centres or voluntary organisations such as Children First. You will get to know the team around each young person as his or her plan develops.

## **2.10 LAAC Nurses**

Looked After and Accommodated Nurses (LAAC Nurses) work with children and young people and their carers to improve the health of young people. They sometimes complete an initial health assessment and should be informed if the child returns home. LAAC Nurses also provide advice on health related matters. They can be contacted at:  
Musselburgh Primary Care Centre, Inveresk Road, Musselburgh, EH21 7BP  
0131 446 4126.

# **Section 3**

# **The National Placement Descriptors**

## Section 3 - The National Placement Descriptors

National 'Placement Descriptors', which are now used by all fostering agencies, enable local areas and the Scottish Government to:

- Build up a detailed picture of foster care in Scotland.
- Improve the way the Care Inspectorate reviews agencies prior to inspection, and
- Facilitate better communication between the various agencies involved in delivering the Child's Plan, and with those involved in monitoring the placement (such as Children's Hearings Scotland).

### The Placement Descriptors

**3.1 Permanent:** This means a child's placement is secured by a Permanence Order (PO). The care planning process has concluded that they need to be permanently cared for away from home. A Permanence Order, which is applied for through the Court, can provide the child (and their carer) with legal security, stability and time to develop strong relationship bonds and a sense of belonging.

**3.2 Long-term:** This term is used when a child has been in placement for longer than 24 months but the placement is not secured by a Permanence Order. (The advice is that this should be an exceptional situation and an indicator that the child's plan requires close scrutiny).

**3.3 Interim:** An interim placement describes when the child has been placed for less than 24 months (and there is no Permanence Order). The care planning process has concluded that the child will benefit from spending time being cared for away from home but there is a time-linked plan for rehabilitation with parents or an alternative care placement is being sought.

**3.4 Emergency:** there are immediate concerns for a child's safety and the child needs to be removed from their home environment as quickly as possible while the care planning process establishes the best option for the child. Under the Looked After Children Regulations 2009, an emergency placement must be reviewed by a local authority within 3 days, and may be extended for a period not exceeding 12 weeks.

**3.5 Short Break:** the child will benefit from a single period of respite or a series of regular short breaks (including emergency placements with a carer who is already providing planned short-break placements to the child or young person).

# **Section 4**

## **Types of Foster Carer Approval**



## **Section 4 – Types of Foster Carer Approval**

Many foster carers are approved to provide more than one type of fostering, while others have a specific approval. Some carers do best looking after a single child while others have the capacity to look after more than one child –whether that's siblings or unrelated children. Foster Carer approval reflects the National Placement Descriptors, as described in the previous section, and takes account of the carers' capacity, skills and expertise. Whichever type of fostering you are approved for, your approval will also include details about the number, ages and range of children who may be placed.

### **4.1 Interim and Emergency Carers**

Interim Foster Carers look after children and young people on a full time basis. The children can be of any age, from birth up to 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Whenever possible brothers and sisters are placed together.

Interim foster care can be for a few days, weeks, months or even years while plans are being made or until permanent carers are identified. Most Interim carers are also approved to provide Emergency Care.

### **4.2 Long Term Carers**

Long term carers often become so when they agree to look after a specific child or young person already living with them on an interim basis. An interim foster carer's approval for long term fostering is ratified through a Fostering Review Panel, to confirm that they have the skills and capacity to offer this form of placement. In most cases, the parents of a child in a long term foster care retain parental rights and responsibilities.

### **4.3 Permanent Carers**

Permanent care foster carers look after children following a decision that the child is unable to return to his or her birth family. Permanent foster carers provide children with the security and stability of knowing that they will have no more moves and can be part of the family until they are grown up and ready to live independently. Generally, the Local Authority will have obtained specified or full parental right and responsibilities through a Permanence Order (PO). Certain parental rights and responsibilities may be shared with foster carers, such as the right to consent to medical treatment or holiday arrangements. Sometimes, birth parents retain or share certain parental rights and responsibilities with the Local Authority and the foster carers.

Interim Foster carers who wish to offer a permanent family to a child they are already looking after are considered at a Fostering Panel. This is so everyone is confident that they have the skills, health and commitment to care for the young person throughout childhood and beyond.

Occasionally, when everyone agrees that this is right for their family and best matches what they have to offer a young person, new foster carers can be approved to provide permanent foster care right from the start. The foster carers are subsequently 'matched' with a child (or siblings) currently waiting for this sort of family.

#### **4.4 Fostering pre-Adoption**

Adopters provide a child with a family for life. Once a Court has granted an adoption order the child becomes a legal member of the adoptive family and ceases to be 'Looked After' in the legal sense.

Sometimes, adopters are also approved as interim foster carers to enable them to foster a child with a view to legal adoption at a later stage. Pre-adoption foster carers are subject to the same regulations and requirements as any other foster carers but are only available for a child with whom they are 'matched'. Once the child is adopted, their fostering approval is terminated.

#### **4.5 Foster Carers and Continuing Care for Young Adults**

The Children and Young People's Act 2014 introduced "Continuing Care", giving young people born after April 1999 the opportunity (with their carers' agreement) to extend their stay until they are twenty one. To be eligible, the young person must no longer be 'looked after' i.e. all legal orders removed or expired. The young person's placement is converted to a "continuing care arrangement" and the carer's approval altered (through a review panel) to reflect this change. This does not mean that carers necessarily stop being foster carers. Dual approval is an option for those carers who also have additional availability for foster placements. Once a Continuing Care arrangement has ended the carers may revert back to being foster carers.

#### **4.6 Short Breaks Carers**

There are a variety of ways in which foster carers provide short breaks to one or more young people. Some carers only provide short breaks while others offer full time placements alongside short breaks. Types of short breaks are listed below.

##### **a) Support Care**

Some young people receive a regular 'short break' while living with their own families. This type of short break is usually called 'Support Care' and is aimed at helping children to stay with parents who are experiencing some sort of difficulty, need help to improve their parenting skills or to manage challenging behaviour. Support Care can happen on a regular basis, perhaps for one or two weekends per month, to enable the parents to have the relief and help they need. Support carers can provide the child with experiences that improve the child's life in the immediate and longer term.

Some support care arrangements continue for several years, others for a shorter, specified period of time. The placements are planned carefully and parents and children are introduced to the carers beforehand. It is important that the child has a positive and enjoyable experience and understands why the support care arrangements have been set up. Most children receiving support care are 'looked after' by the Council and there will be a Child's Plan and regular reviews of the support care arrangements.

Support Care has particular challenges for foster carers. The child's own parents are his or her main carers and foster carers must work closely with them and be sensitive to their views and feelings.

#### b) Respite

Respite Care is generally used to describe a Short Break for a child who is accommodated on a full time basis with another foster carer. The full time foster carer may need emergency, occasional or regular periods of respite. Such placements, unless in an emergency, should always be planned with the child's and the carers' supervising social workers.

It is important that the main foster carers and the foster carers providing the respite work closely together and (wherever possible) plan the respite in order to provide continuity and minimise distress for the child.

#### c) Nominated Foster Carers

A Nominated Carer is usually a friend or family member of a full time foster carer and provides a specific form of Short Break. Nominated carers are approved as foster carers but are only available to the foster carer who nominated them to cover that carer's annual leave or short periods of respite needed in an emergency. Any additional care provided by the nominated carer must be agreed as part of the child's plan and the reason it is needed clearly recorded and approved by a senior manager.

Nominated Carers can get to know the children well and provide children with continuity and security when the main carers are unavailable.

It is important that supervising social workers and the child's social workers know when a child is going to stay with the Nominated Carer and that the Nominated Carer does not look after the young person for longer, or more frequently, than agreed.

#### d) 'Share The Care' (short breaks for children who have a disability)

'Share the Care' offers a family based short break service for children and young people who have a physical and/or learning disability. Share the Carers are approved by the fostering panel therefore the contents of this handbook apply equally to Share the Carers.

Children receiving share the care are of all ages though most often of school age. Most of them live with their families or occasionally with foster carers. All the children are affected by disability, which can include learning disabilities and autism. Some have a physical disability and use a wheelchair some have hearing or sight impairments. A number have epilepsy and a small number have complex health needs.

Share the Carer's provide support regularly throughout the year during the day, weekend, school holidays or overnights, with support taking place in the carers own home or in the community.

Most Share the Carer's are linked to one child and their family, although some may be linked to several. Very few Foster Carer households provide full time placements to children with complex needs. It is important that there is careful matching of carer to child and family, and introductions are well planned and taken at a pace that suits everyone. Often Share the Carers continue to support children into adulthood.

Share the Carers are provided with a range of support from East Lothian Council including learning and development opportunities that ensure the needs of children can be met such as, administering rescue medication or safe moving and handling.

#### **4.7 Outreach**

Outreach is entirely optional on a carer's part. It involves looking after children out with your home, such as taking a child to an activity, supporting a child with a hobby or supervising a child's contact with his or her parent. It can suit some foster carers to have approval to provide outreach, as this can be done in conjunction with other placements – such as when a fostered child is at school and as no overnight stays are involved does not affect the number of placements the carer is approved for.

Outreach payments are on an hourly basis (see section dealing with carer payments).

#### **4.8 Parent & Child Placements**

Occasionally we ask foster carers to consider offering a placement to a parent/parent to be and her baby. The young parent may be under 18 and looked after herself or over 18 and therefore an adult.

The placement is offered to help the young parent develop parenting skills and to provide a safe place for the baby. The child is formally looked after and accommodated so that his or her care can be monitored and plans made and reviewed. A parent and child placement will only be made after a detailed assessment of all the circumstances, the level of support needed and the appropriateness of the placement.

The foster carers' views must be taken into account whenever it becomes evident that a young person already in foster care is pregnant. Babies born to a young person in foster care ideally remain with the young parent. The child becomes formally 'looked after' and therefore subject to care planning. If a young person cannot remain with her carers after the child's birth then plans need to be made to seek an alternative placement in good time.

Foster carers have to strike a delicate balance between supporting the new parent to look after her child and, as the named foster carer for the baby, ensuring that the child's needs are being met. Usually, the foster carer will have an identified role in contributing to a parenting assessment that will determine future plans. This is both challenging and potentially stressful, particularly if the assessment determines that the child cannot safely remain with his or her mother.

Carers providing parent and child placements have a key role in helping the child/young adult move on when the assessment is completed. Sometimes the child and parent will move together (as this has been assessed as safe). Sometimes the baby will stay temporarily with the foster carers until a permanent family (kinship or adoptive) has been identified. Sometimes the baby moves first, to an interim placement because the young parent needs the ongoing support of her foster carers. These are complex matters and can be emotionally challenging, particularly when carers want to offer support to both the parent and the child. It is however important that foster carers work to support the plan for the child.

#### **4.9 Step Forward – East Lothian's Supported Lodgings Scheme**

East Lothian is developing a Supported Lodgings scheme for young adults who were previously looked after and accommodated. This scheme is called "Step Forward". A young person may not want to stay with their former foster carers or be unable to for other reasons. Or they may have tried living independently and now need a bit of extra help before trying again. A separate information guide is available for carers who are interested in supporting a young person prepare for adulthood by becoming a supported lodging host.

# **Section 5**

## **Becoming a Foster Carer and the Carer Review Process**

## **Section 5 -Becoming a Foster Carer and the Carer Review Process**

This section outlines the process of becoming a foster carer, the steps that follow approval and the reviewing procedures.

### **5.1 Skills to Foster Training Program**

It is essential that foster carers are properly assessed, prepared and supported for the task of fostering. For this reason anyone wishing to become a foster carer must complete a 'Skills to Foster' training course. The training program provides an opportunity to learn more about fostering, the different types of fostering and the ranges of children who need foster carers.

### **5.2 The Homestudy / Assessment**

The Homestudy is an assessment of your circumstances, interest in fostering, capacity to care for vulnerable children, the skills you bring, the range of young people for whom you are best suited, the type of fostering that would be right for you and the additional learning that could help you as a foster carer. The assessment also looks at the support you might need and who is available to provide this.

Everyone living in your household, adults and children, is included in the assessment. Any pets you may have, that could be a factor, are also considered (see following section).

If you are single, but in a significant relationship, then that person must be included, even if you do not live together on a full-time basis and your partner is not seeking approval as a foster carer. The assessment will look at the role that person will have with any child living with you.

References are sought from people who know you well and can help the assessing sw understand the strengths you might bring to fostering.

The homestudy includes a range of formal checks (such as health, police, Home Health and Safety and, if you drive, MOT and licence checks) and these are regularly updated throughout your fostering career.

### **5.3 Pets**

During the initial assessment, and throughout your fostering career, we will discuss how any pets you have and how this could affect children placed with you.

Household pets can be very beneficial to young people. They can become recipients of the child's emotions without expecting too much in return. Caring for animals can also help teach children about responsibility. Some children are afraid of dogs or other animals and others will not have learned to treat animals kindly. There are however a number of health risks associated with certain birds or animals and some animals may trigger allergies.

Certain breeds of dog are banned, in particular those referred to in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. If there are doubts about other breeds of dog (or other type of pet) then an animal behaviourist may be asked to complete a specific assessment of your pet.

NB: See Practice note 'Placing Children with Dog-owning Families' contained within the appendices.

#### **5.4 The Fostering Panel**

The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 require that a Fostering Panel considers all foster carer applications. These Regulations also require that foster carers are periodically reviewed by the Fostering Panel.

Fostering Panels are comprised of people who have relevant knowledge and skills, experience and expertise such as:

- Social workers in East Lothian's Children and Adult Services;
- Child care professionals from Voluntary Organisations and other Local Authorities;
- Foster carers from outwith East Lothian with relevant experience and skills;
- Adults who were previously fostered or adopted;
- People with relevant personal experience or who work in a relevant profession.

When needed, the Panel can call on a Legal Adviser, a Medical Advisor for adults and a Medical Advisor for children. Where relevant, the Panel may involve an AFA Scotland Black and Ethnic Minorities specialist. Normally, at least four panel members are present, including a chairperson but the minimum required is three panel members. A minute-taker and one or more advisers might also be present.

The Panel has a number of options available. The Panel may;

- Recommend approval as foster carers, including a recommendation about the terms and conditions of approval i.e. the number, gender or ages of children they are approved to look after. (The LAC Regulations Amendments introduced in December 2014 set a maximum placement limit of three unrelated children, though the norm tends to be one or two. Larger sibling groups are the exceptional to this rule).
- Recommend that an applicant should *not* be approved as a foster carer, giving the reasons for this recommendation.
- Defer making any recommendation if panel members feel the information before them is unclear or further assessment is needed.
- Change the terms of a foster carers level and type of approval – see section 5.10.



## **5.5 Attending a Fostering Panel**

Applicants (and approved foster carers attending a review – see section 5.10) receive a written invitation to attend the Panel.

The Panel members receive the reports at least a week in advance so they have time to consider them.

The Panel first meets with the social worker before being joined by the applicant or foster carer. This is because occasionally there is sensitive or third party information that needs to be addressed. The applicants and the Panel aim to have an open discussion about the strengths and areas for development identified within reports.

It is not the Panel's role to re-assess the applicants or foster carers, rather it is to evaluate the assessment material available to them. In doing this, panel members may ask the assessing social worker to outline evidence that has led to particular statements or recommendations or ask the applicant/ foster carer to contribute to this or clarify factual information.

The Panel will ask the applicant to withdraw from the meeting while they discuss their recommendation. In most instances, you will then be told what the panel are recommending. The exception will be if the panel feel they need more information to reach a recommendation.

The panel make their formal recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (see next section) through a minute taken at the meeting.

We welcome feedback from carers attending the Fostering Panel or review out with the Panel. You should be provided with a form, but please ask for one if you aren't given one at the review.

## **5.6 The Agency Decision Maker**

The Fostering Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The ADM is a qualified social worker in a senior management role who is able to make decisions that affect children but who does not have direct line management responsibilities within the Fostering or Adoption Service (or for any child being considered) and is therefore independent.

The ADM can accept or amend the recommendation made by the fostering panel. You should receive formal written notification of Agency Decision Maker's decision within two weeks.

## **5.7 Panel Minutes**

Your supervising social worker will give you a copy of the minutes taken at your foster carer approval meeting or review along with any comments

made by the ADM about the terms of your approval. Your supervising social worker will review the content with you and together you should agree a plan to address any actions or learning points.

If you do not receive a copy from your social worker, please ask or contact the team leader in your supervising workers absence.

### **5.8 Foster Carer Agreements**

All foster carer signs a Foster Carer Agreement (see The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009).

You should read the Foster Carer Agreement carefully and discuss it fully with your supervising social worker. It outlines your responsibilities as a foster carer and the Council's responsibilities towards you as a foster carer. You should keep a signed copy. A copy is retained on your records.

The Foster Carer Agreement includes a requirement that you declare any convictions that occur after approval. The Council has discretion to undertake further checks, including police checks, at any time considered necessary.

Some of the items contained in the agreement are covered in more detail in this handbook. If you require more information about any aspect of the agreement you should speak to your supervising social worker.

### **5.9 Foster Carer Profiles**

Your social worker will help you to prepare a child friendly Foster Carer Profile of your family and your home, giving a brief description of your lifestyle and routines and containing a few pictures that can be shown to a young person, and his or her parents. This can be a really useful way of helping a young person who is feeling worried about fostering.

Your supervising social worker will also prepare a more formal short profile about you and your household, describing the terms of your fostering approval, as the Children's Hearing will require this before making an Order that a child should be placed with you.

### **5.10 Safer Caring Family Policy (including 'Safer Touch')**

Your social worker will provide you with a book produced by The Fostering Network that offers guidance and advice about Safer Caring practices.

**Please refer to this for more detailed advice.**

A Safer Caring Policy is important because:

- The history of looked after children may make them vulnerable;
- Carers and their families can be at risk of complaints about the standard of care provided or allegations of abuse.

A Safer Caring Policy helps to ensure that clear information is available to the child and, where relevant, his or her parents, about the customs and rules within your family, for example:

- Names used within the family
- How affection is shown
- Privacy in the bathroom
- Personal care routines
- How the family dress in public areas of the home
- Rules about use of bedrooms
- Where the child can play unsupervised – when – and for how long
- Who may care for the children when the carers go out?
- Rules about travelling by car or public transport
- Rules about taking photos and videos
- Rules for managing difficult behaviour (should relate to the needs of specific child)
- Social Media use (carers and young people),TV access and smart phones
- Ensuring the safety of the child when out-with the home

Other areas for consideration:

- Helping children learn to say no if they don't want to be touched;
- Ensuring children who are old enough are able to wash and bath themselves;
- Ensuring carers and children do not share a bed, even if the child is ill;
- If you have older children, you will need to keep an eye on relationships that might develop with fostered teenagers (and plan to manage this). Both carers' children and fostered children can be vulnerable in these situations.

**Showing affection** - Physical contact is an important part of basic nurturing, not just for young children but to provide reassurance, encouragement and supervision for all children. Providing children with warmth and affection is vital for their development but doing this in a safe way is essential.

Carers should not assume that the hugs and kisses they give their own children are appropriate and carers may need to show affection in different ways when fostered children are around. Children should be asked if they want a hug, this can be done in a light hearted way that doesn't interrupt the spontaneity of the moment.

## Safer Touch

All children need lots of safe physical contact with adults who care for them to help them to develop a secure attachment style.

Healthy physical contact:

- helps children to feel safe
- helps the child to feel close and develop a sense of trust
- helps them feel valued and cared for
- soothes them when they are upset
- makes them more aware of the world around them.

Younger children need the security of adults keeping them physically safe through hand holding and lifting at times. All children need affection for emotional comfort.

No child should feel comfortable with a lot of close affection with unknown adults and it is expected that it will take time for relationships to develop. It is very important that any physical affection is taken at the child's pace and any physical contact is to meet the child's needs rather than the adult's.

Children who have learned that adults are not always safe or trustworthy are likely to be afraid and sometimes unable to manage close physical contact. It is extremely important that foster carers take any physical contact very slowly, ensuring that the child understands that they have control of their body and whether or not they desire any physical reassurance.

An example of ensuring that a child is in control, would be a foster carer saying "you look sad and I'd like to give you a hug but only if that is ok with you?" If a child appears uncomfortable with physical reassurance then it is not reassuring and this needs to stop with acknowledgement that it's not helpful for the child just now.

When children find touch uncomfortable, there are a number of ways that touch can be introduced on a gradual basis, including some 'Theraplay' techniques. The child's needs need to be considered on an individual basis and this needs careful consideration with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker.

Ultimately we aspire to help all foster child to feel lovable, valued and that they are worthy of close emotional relationship with important people in their lives.

**Reviewing your Safer Caring Policy-** Your supervising social worker will help you to consider and write your family's policy and ensure this is reviewed regularly. You will need to update your policy whenever a new child is placed, taking account of the age and maturity of the child, whether they have any impairment that would affect their safety, e.g. a learning difficulty, visual or hearing problem or a tendency to get into scrapes, such as being characteristically impulsive.

### **5.11 Ongoing Learning and Development**

All foster carers, no matter how experienced, must commit to regular learning opportunities that promote their professional development. A range of opportunities are provided throughout the year.

Newly approved foster carers must also attend a monthly training programme in the first year following approval.

Your supervising social worker will help you to identify aspects of training to enhance your fostering skills.

Each fostering household receives a weekly emailed News Bulletin from the Fostering Team containing news about the Fostering Service, the updated training calendar and other items of interest.

Individual learning needs and styles vary from person to person and the opportunities provided reflects this. There are a number of ways in which training needs can be met:

- Participating in support groups;
- Specialist reading and discussion with your supervising social worker;
- Courses or seminars organised in-house or by another organisation;
- Online training courses;
- Multiagency training;
- Monthly protected learning opportunities held in Children's Services which carers may also attend.

Each foster carer completes a Learning Passport to evidence their continuous learning and development. If needed, your supervising social worker can support you in completing this.

You will need to keep your Learning Passport up to date and remember to bring it with you when you come to your Panel Review.

The Fostering Team has or can access a selection of books, publications and magazines that may be helpful for foster carers.

## 5.12 Foster Carer Reviews

The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 set out when foster carers must be reviewed at a Fostering Panel. These are:

- Within 12 months of first being approved as a foster carer;
- A minimum of every three years thereafter;
- Whenever the terms of your registration needs to be changed, such as the age and range of children you are approved to look after;
- Whenever there are significant changes to your circumstances or responsibilities such as assuming care of dependent adults or children or a new partner joining your household;
- If there have been concerns about the quality of care being provided;
- If a foster carer has been convicted of an offence.

The key purpose of the review is to confirm that foster carers are providing care at a standard expected and are receiving appropriate support and help.

In some ways the review report is more important than the initial assessment because it is based on your actual experience of fostering.

Many of the issues discussed in the Homestudy will be revisited at the review, such as whether the range of children for whom you are currently approved is still right, whether your own children have support needs in connection with being part of a fostering family and so on. The reports and discussion will include:

- Your main achievements, strengths and skills;
- The support you have received;
- Contributions you have made to fostering;
- Particular skills and training needs you may have;
- Whether there have been any significant changes in your circumstances since the previous review/ approval panel that could affect you as a foster carer or any child placed with you.

The review will discuss your training and development records, to ensure that you are maintaining your commitment to continuous learning and development as a foster carer.

Your supervising social worker is responsible for keeping track of when a review is required, booking a panel date and requesting the necessary reports. Reports are provided by the foster carers, the supervising social worker, the placing workers for all children placed since the previous review, whether or not they are still with you. The young person and his or her parents are invited to give feedback too, if they wish to do so.

## **Reviews and Checks**

- Supervising social workers ensure that Insurance Certificates for vehicles, M.O.T and driving licences are satisfactory and up to date. This is generally done for each panel.
- A medical records check is needed every two years or annually if over 65. A full medical may be requested at any time if there is a health issue.
- Health and Safety checks and Pet Questionnaires are updated for the first review and then every 3 years or whenever considered necessary.
- An unannounced visit is required at least once per year, and the fostering panel will expect your social worker to confirm that this has taken place.
- Disclosure Scotland checks for adults living in the carer household are updated every 2 years.

Following the review, the panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about the continued or amended terms of approval.

The Fostering Panel may recommend and the ADM make a decision about the following:

- Approval for the following 3 years or a specified shorter period. This may include changes to the ages, gender or number of children that may be placed. It may also include a change to a different type of fostering, such as from support care/short breaks to full time/interim.
- Deregistration as a carer, for example if you are retiring from fostering.
- Deregistration following a significant concern where investigations have come to this recommendation. This is very rare and the carer is always advised of this potential outcome well in advance.

You will be told the Panel recommendation within 24 hours and receive the written decision from the ADM within 2 weeks.

### **5.13 Internal (Informal) Reviews**

Internal Reviews should take place midway between the 3 yearly Panel Reviews. These are less formal, can take place in the carers' home and are chaired by a fostering team senior practitioner or team leader. An Internal Review cannot recommend or make any changes to foster carers' terms of approval but are an opportunity to confirm that actions required at the most recent Panel Review have progressed, appropriate support is in place, agree carers' training priorities and confirm that the placement is meeting everyone's needs. If there are issues or concerns arising from the internal review, then the chairperson may recommend a Panel Review is held to address these. The same range of reports are obtained as for a Panel Reviews and the Agency Decision Maker receives a minute of the meeting. The ADM writes to the Foster carers after an internal review.

### **5.14 Appeals (Review of the Decision)**

If you are not satisfied with the Agency's Decision following a Panel to consider your initial fostering application or a foster carer review, you may request a reconsideration. It can be helpful to discuss these issues beforehand with the social worker involved or a senior member of staff in the Fostering Service. A review of the decision will be considered by a different Panel and a different Agency Decision Maker. The decisions of this appeal's process are final.

### **5.15 Placements out-with Approval**

Foster Carers are occasionally asked to take on responsibilities that are out with their specific approval when there are high demands on the Fostering Service. This may relate to the number of children looked after or the age and gender of the children. Before taking on any additional responsibility you should consider the request carefully with your supervising social worker. If the additional responsibility goes beyond three months then a panel should review your terms of approval.

### **5.16 Supporting Foster Carers' Children**

The Fostering Network produce a booklet for children whose parents are thinking of fostering called "Stella Comes to Stay", the story of a young girl arriving at her new home and explores "the fun and challenges that fostering brings to both her and the (fostering) family". A copy can be obtained through the Fostering Network [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

Carers own children often benefit from knowing other young people whose parents foster and sharing their experiences. Your supervising social work can help by linking young people with others of a similar age.

Carers' children play an important part in fostering but can also carry many of the stresses of fostering. They may be overwhelmed by the child's need for their attention, or feel embarrassed by his or her behaviour or may feel responsible for the young person. Their personal possessions may be broken. It is hard if they believe their parents are being treated with disrespect or see their parents dealing with distressing behaviours. It can be equally hard for carers' children when a fostered child moves on, maybe after spending years with the family.

You will have to think carefully about what to tell your children when a child moves in or is 'linked'. You may feel torn between meeting the needs of your own children and respecting the confidence of the fostered child. You may also want to protect your child from some of the distressing details of the child's circumstances. It is however important to bear in mind that young people often share their story openly and not necessarily in the most appropriate way. Your own children will be better off being informed by you at a level appropriate to their age and stage. You should talk this through with both the child's social worker and your own social worker so that



everyone is clear and in agreement about what your child or children will be told. Aim to talk regularly with your children about how fostering affects your family and involving your supervising social worker can be helpful.

### **5.17 Carers' Health and Wellbeing**

Caring for other people's children, who may be in crisis or affected by trauma and unmet need, can and does become stressful. Many demands are placed on foster carers, particularly if caring for more than one child and dealing with more than one child's social worker's expectations. You should feel able to talk about this with your supervising social worker, who is there to help if you are feeling overwhelmed or feel you are being asked to take on more than is reasonable or achievable.

If you have an accident or suffer from serious physical or mental health problems that may affect your ability to care you must contact the supervising social worker, team leader of the senior duty social worker as soon as possible.

### **5.18 Smoking, Vaping and E-cigarettes**

Smoking and passive smoking harm the health of everyone in a household. We have to balance the right to smoke with the child's right to health. We feel sure that you will understand why we want to move to a situation where children and young people are looked after in smoke-free households.

We actively encourage carers who smoke to give up and know that many have already done so. We can give plenty of support and information to carers wishing to quit smoking and can put carers in touch with smoking cessation groups.

We choose foster carers and adopters for their ability to look after children effectively and demonstrate positive behaviour – setting a good example, as it were. If you smoke, it is hard to explain to a young person why they should not. Children who live with smokers are three times more likely to become smokers themselves as adults. Having parents (or guardians) who smoke is frequently cited as the top reason young people take up smoking. By taking the active decision not to smoke, or not to smoke in front of the children you look after, you will be looking after your own health as well as theirs. Children placed with you may be less likely to start smoking later in life. Your decision not to smoke could make a big difference to their future health and happiness.

### **Children & secondhand or third hand smoke**

Breathing in secondhand smoke is particularly harmful for children. Children who breathe in secondhand smoke have an increased risk of:

- cot death (sudden infant death syndrome)– this is twice as likely in babies whose mothers smoke;

- developing asthma– smoking can also trigger asthma attacks in children who already have the condition;
- serious respiratory (breathing) conditions such as bronchitis and pneumonia– younger children are also much more likely to be admitted to hospital for a serious respiratory infection;
- meningitis;
- coughs and colds;
- a middle ear infection, which can cause hearing loss.

Thirdhand smoke is generally considered to be residual nicotine and other toxic chemicals left on the smoker's skin, clothes, hair and a variety of indoor surfaces such as curtains and furniture. Infants, children and non-smoking adults may be at risk of tobacco-related health problems when they inhale, ingest or touch substances containing third-hand smoke.

In light of the risks associated with smoking, including second and third hand smoke, East Lothian has developed a policy on smoking and foster care, a copy of which is contained in the appendices and summarised as follows:

- New Fostering and Adoptive applicants for children under 11 must be non-smokers. This also applies to other adults living in the house.
- New Applicants for children of all ages who have a disability or health difficulty must be non-smokers.
- New applicants for children older than 11, who smoke, must not smoke indoors. This applies to all household residents and visitors.
- Foster carers or adopters who have successfully given up smoking are not permitted to foster /adopt high risk groups of children (children under 5, children with a disability, chest problems or other condition deemed relevant by the medical advisor) until they have stopped smoking for at least 12 months.
- We will not move young people who are already in placement with carers who smoke unless this is their wish, though we will consider the views of their parents.
  - Already approved foster carers or adopters (and anyone resident within the home) must not smoke indoors.
  - Foster carers and adopters should ensure their visitors do not smoke in any part of the home.
  - Foster carers and adopters must not smoke or permit anyone to smoke in a car used for transporting children of any age.

- Foster carers and adopters should not smoke in the presence of children and young people.
- We will place young people from non-smoking birth families with non-smoking carers, wherever possible.

### **Smoking and young people**

- It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to purchase cigarettes or tobacco.
- You should not buy cigarettes for any young person in your care, no matter what their age.
- Young people over the age of 18 may purchase their own cigarettes. You should try to discourage them and you should not allow them to smoke in your home.

If a young person over the age of 14 chooses to smoke, they must have the written approval of his/her parent or guardian.

### **E- Cigarettes and Vaping**

Fostering Network position on e-cigarettes from 2014 is set out below but recent research is now questioning the safety of e-cigarettes.

*“We have considered the emergence of e-cigarettes, and consider the current research evidence provides no compelling reasons for restricting the use of e-cigarettes. Therefore, foster carers (in the opinion of TFN) should not be prevented from fostering or applying to foster because of their use of e-cigarettes. However, we strongly encourage foster carers not to use e-cigarettes in front of children and young people until more evidence is gained about the role modelling effect of this on the smoking behaviour of children more generally.”*

At the last AFA Medical Adviser Forum, January 2018, the subject of use of e cigarettes was discussed. The following points were made:

- E cigarette smoking is modelling addictive behaviour in adults and as such is not helpful to any child and particularly those who have been removed from home because of the addictive behaviours of their parents and others around them. Going outside to vape does not help with this as could be seen to indicate more compulsive tendencies that override other considerations including the person's physical comfort but also time with children and time spent with others in social situations.
- The chargers for e cigarettes are often poor quality and there have been several fires reported as having been started by an e cigarette charger.

- There have been incidents of children ingesting vaping fluid that has not been kept safe.
- It will be many years until sufficient information has been gathered and research conducted to be sure that the vapour from e-cigarettes can be counted as safe for children—particularly young children.
- Many medical advisers consider it unwise to promote vaping as acceptable around looked after children but note that there is insufficient science as yet to be absolute in their advice.

Taking both sources of advice into account, the Policy of East Lothian's Fostering and Adoption Service is that while the use of e-cigarettes and vaping is not desirable, it would not in itself preclude approval if limited to out with the home. However, the applicant's pattern of use, and the potential impact on a child, will form part of the approval and review assessment. In order to prevent accidental poisoning, for example by young children drinking e-liquids, you should store your e-cigarettes and liquids away safely, just as you would with household cleaning products and medicines.

### **5.19 Drugs and Alcohol**

Carers must not provide children and young people under the age of 18 with alcohol. Great care must be taken around the storage of alcohol in your home so that young people cannot easily access this without you being aware.

You must consider the impact of young people seeing you consume alcohol and ensure that you are modelling a responsible and mature attitude. You must never be intoxicated when fostered children are present or may shortly be present.

If you become concerned that a young person placed with you may be misusing drugs or alcohol speak to their social worker or your supervising social worker.

### **5.20 Firearms**

You must tell your assessing or supervising social worker if you or any member of your household keeps or proposes to keep a firearm in the home. You must satisfy that the use and storage of firearms is in line with current police requirements. Thought must also be given to possible dangers that replica, imitation or ornamental weapons might present.

### **5.21 Participation and service development**

East Lothian is committed to working in partnership with carers to improve services and outcomes for young people. Each year, a Carers Consultation Meeting is held to which all carers, supervising social workers and managers are invited. Carers are consulted in advance to plan the meeting and ensure carers' issues are appropriately raised.

The Annual Consultation is also an opportunity to celebrate the work of the past year, plan for the year to come and importantly to come together and share news and views. Please let your social worker know if you are interested in being involved with planning or at any time if you have a particular issue you wish to raise.

Carers are included when East Lothian's adoption and fostering services are being inspected, or when we are considering changes to service provision or conditions. On these or similar occasions we arrange short-life consultation meetings with groups of carers. It is also our practice, whenever possible, to involve carers when appointing Fostering & Adoption social workers, through foster carers having a role in the interviewing and selection process. Please let your Social Worker know if this is something you are interested in being part of.

We encourage new carers to meet and "buddy" more experienced carers who can provide support and advice. Your supervising social worker can discuss and arrange this for you. Alternatively, you may prefer to "buddy" someone you meet at the training or support group and we encourage these informal networking arrangements too.

We try to hold one or two informal get-together events each year, to which carers' own children and children in foster care are welcome. These include a summer BBQ (weather permitting) Christmas parties or discos and are a great opportunity to meet up and share ideas, away from formal reviews and meeting. Carers have taken a lead role in arranging such informal celebrations and we are keen to see this developed further.

Other ways that carers participate in developing services include:

- Participating in fostering recruitment campaigns;
- Being a trainer or co-leader at training opportunities;
- Membership of fostering panels (outwith East Lothian generally);
- Contributing to the weekly foster carers' bulletin, emailed to all fostering households.

### **5.22 Access to foster carer records**

The Looked After Children (Scotland) regulations 2009 require Local Authorities and other fostering agencies to retain confidential files for all approved foster carer. This file, held electronically, holds details of approval, amendments to approval and termination of approval. It also contains a record of each placement made. Foster carer's records must be retained for at least 100 years from the date the approval was terminated. The Local Authority or fostering agency must ensure that the information contained in the carer's records is treated as confidential.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and The Access to Medical Reports Act (1988) also regulate records held by the Local Authority. Third party information cannot be shared without the consent of the provider of that information, such as your GP report or personal references.

# **Section 6**

# **Planning for**

# **Children**

## Section 6 - Planning for Children

### 6.1 Linking foster carers and young people

At any one time there may be a number of young people waiting for a foster care placement. Some of these young people are still living at home, some are already placed with carers and others are in residential care or kinship care. Some children are referred on an emergency basis following abuse or the breakdown of relationships at home, others need a planned move to foster care.

The Fostering Team have details of children waiting and information about foster carers who have vacancies. If we feel that a particular foster carer can meet the needs of a certain child, either the foster carer's own supervising social worker or the duty worker/duty senior will contact the carer for an initial discussion. If both feel the possibility can be explored further, the worker normally arranges a fuller discussion between the carer and the child's social worker.

It is mandatory at this stage that the carer receives as much information as *is known* about the child, including the child's history, information about the child's needs, family and other important people, health and education, development, including any behavioural concerns, issues relating to sexuality and so on. Sometimes, particularly if the child has not previously come to the attention of Children's Services, very little is known about the child, other than that related to the immediate crisis. Often it is only after a child is accommodated that the full picture comes to light.

If the placement goes ahead, we ensure that full written information about the child is provided. This is not always possible when children are placed on an emergency basis, in which case the child's social worker should get written information to you within 72 hours, sooner if possible.

Whenever possible, we arrange introductions and visits between the carers, the child and his/her parents. The introductory process can help to confirm that the placement is right both for the child and your family. It can help to re-assure the child and parents, who will have a variety of feelings, including anger, anxiety, fear, guilt. Having a copy of your 'Carer Profile,' which gives a little information about you and your family, can help parents and young people feel reassured.

Children placed with foster carers sometimes have a medical examination beforehand, but only if there are specific concerns. The Looked-After and Accommodated Children's (LAC) nurse will compile a health report for all looked after children as soon as possible after they are accommodated. If the child is likely to be cared for by the foster carers for a while, it may be appropriate to register the child with your local doctor, but this will be agreed



at the Looked After Review. Foster carers should receive a 'consent to medical treatment' form, signed by the child's parent, at the time of placement.

(See also section 6.13 for fuller details about medical consent, treatment and medical records).

## **6.2 Getting to know the young person**

The first few days are important in helping the child deal with separation from his or her family or previous carers, as well as helping them settle into unfamiliar surroundings. It is helpful to the child at the start of the placement to:

- Show the child all the rooms in the house and remind where the toilet and bathrooms are;
- Explain which rooms are private (such as your room, although it is advisable that they have seen inside every room so it isn't a mystery);
- Allow the child to keep familiar toys and clothes, even if torn or dirty;
- Find out whether they sleep with a light on or not;
- Explain family routines – as discussed in your safer caring policy;
- Provide information about pocket money and personal allowances;
- Ask about his/her favourite meals and drinks.

The child may well be distressed, particularly if there has been little time for preparation. Each child may react differently but all will need reassurance and if old enough a chance to talk about their feelings.

A child may display behaviours that weren't anticipated, such as wetting, being clingy or telling lies. This is most likely a symptom of distress and may lessen as the child begins to settle and trust you.

## **6.3 The Child's Plan**

All young people who are 'looked after' have a 'Child's Plan', which is signed by those involved in supporting the child/young person including the foster carer. This sets down the assessment of the child's needs and plans for his/her future care. A sample plan can be found in the appendix.

The Child's Plan may be available before the child is placed, or will be agreed at a review within the first few days of placement.

The Initial planning and placement agreement meeting will take place within 72 hours of the child's placement with you.

You should expect to receive information about the following:

- The child's history;

- Information about his or her needs;
- Family background and contact arrangements, including any restrictions on contact;
- Health and education information;
- Any issues relating to the child's ethnicity, religious, language and culture;
- Behavioural issues;
- Matters relating to sexuality and safer caring;
- Information about why the child is being accommodated;
- The plan for the child and what the child/family know about this;
- The child's legal status and who has parental rights and responsibilities.

In some emergency circumstances there may be very little or even no information known about the child. In these cases the child's social worker will continue to seek out information and share whatever becomes known as soon as possible.

Carers are asked to sign a Placement Agreement, which specifies their role in relation to the care of the child (see appendix). Please ensure that you sign a Placement Agreement. Ask the child's social worker and your supervising social worker to provide this if you are not asked to do so within days of the placement.

#### **6.4 Reviewing the Child's Plan**

The Child's Plan should be reviewed within six weeks and then at intervals of not more than six months. Reviews usually take place at Council venues or more rarely, and only with your agreement, in the carer's home.

The review is chaired by an independent chairperson and is usually attended by the child and his/her parents, the foster carers, and the child's social worker and others who have a contribution to make, such as the carers' supervising social worker, health visitor, community midwife, teacher, psychologist. Various reports are available to the review, including one from the carers detailing the child's progress, celebrating the child's successes and highlighting any concerns. The carers' supervising social worker can help carers complete this if necessary. The foster carer's contribution to the review is extremely important. Carers get to know the child very well and can observe and comment about his or her response to care from first-hand knowledge.

The child's welfare should be of paramount importance in all decisions made about him or her. If the child is old enough to express his/her views, the child's social worker must ensure that these views are represented.

The Child's Plan will have a number of areas of focus such as the day to day care of the child, his or her educational needs, health needs, interests and hobbies that are important to promote the young person's development. Where appropriate, the plan will include steps that the child's parents need to take so that the child can safely return to their care. The Plan must also focus on the child's future and where he or she will be permanently living. It is essential to avoid 'drift' in the child's plan or the child remaining with foster carers longer than is needed.

### **6.5 Transitions: Moving On**

At some stage the plan will be for the child to leave your home and move on. Transitions can be a highly stressful time for all concerned. Foster carers might worry about whether the young person is ready or whether the birth parents/new parents/carers will really understand the child's needs, likes and dislikes.

When preparing for a move, to whatever destination, it is vital that you help the child or young person feel secure and reassured about the move, as well as demonstrating your continuing concern for her future. His or her ability to settle after the move will depend to a large extent on the confidence the adults show in the plan.

Moving on can be as disruptive for the child as being accommodated in the first place. No child should move to another placement or family member without at least 24 hours' notice and it is preferable that sufficient notice is given to allow an alternative and appropriate placement to be identified. The longer the child has been in your care the longer this notice needs to be as work will be needed to help the young person, and any other children in your household understand what is happening and why. Exceptions to this are in an emergency or if the child is at risk.

Generally, moves are planned through a LAAC review meeting.

### **6.6 Returning Home**

Ideally, children return to their families when the time is right. Foster carers play an important role in ensuring this happens smoothly, through preparing the child and working positively with the child's family. Occasionally, you may feel uncomfortable about a child going home to his or her family, particularly if you are worried about whether the parents and the child are ready. Any concerns you have about the plan should always be shared with your social worker. Sometimes, however, carers and other members of the team may have to put their personal feelings aside, and work to the agreed plan to enable the child's return home to be as stress free as possible.

When a young person is to return home, the final weeks of his/her placement will involve a more intensive level of contact with his/her family, perhaps including overnight and weekend visits home. Guidance from you on the value of play or constructive methods of discipline may be helpful and

welcomed by some parents, but it is important that you give them the opportunity to work out the best ways for themselves.

### **6.7 When going home is not possible – what next?**

Other plans must be made for the child's future when returning home is not possible. Children often have quite definite views about their own futures and it is important to listen to what they have to say. Their understanding and realistic assessment of the situation will depend on their age and stage of development but most will have some ability to be active in planning for their futures.

The most desirable solution for those children who cannot return to their original families is generally to be placed with a permanent substitute family. A few, more likely to be older teenagers, may do better in a residential care setting.

- **Kinship Care**

The first consideration whenever a child cannot safely return to live with their own parents is whether a close relative can provide the child with the security of a permanent family. The availability of family members or family friends is usually checked out before the child is placed with foster carers, but sometimes kinship carers are only identified, or come forward, when the family become aware or accept that rehabilitation to parents is no longer an option. Kinship carers are formally assessed, particularly when a permanent kinship care arrangement is being considered. Foster carers have a key role in helping the kinship carers understand the child's routines and helping the child move in a planned and calm way.

- **Permanent and Long Term Foster Care**

Sometimes the interim foster carers are in a position to offer the child a permanent (or long term) family once 'permanent care' becomes the plan for the child.

Interim foster carers offering permanent or long term care are reapproved at panel, particularly for younger children. This so that everyone is clear about the level of commitment needed and being offered.

For some children, a permanent placement with their interim foster carers isn't possible or appropriate and these children generally remain with their interim foster carers until alternative permanent carers are identified.

- **Adoption**

Adoption can take some time, and the foster carers looking after the child may become attached to the child as the months go by. Your task, however, is to support the plan for the child and help him or her prepare to move on. Helping a child understand what has happened enables him/her to 'move on' more successfully.

The final weeks of placement will involve intensive introductions and contact with the new family, possibly including overnights (depending on the age of the child and the circumstances).

Adoptive parents or new carers can find the support given by foster carers invaluable in getting to know their child but it can also be hard for them to expose their lack of experience in the presence of foster carers who are confident and know the child well. It is also a stressful time for the child, regardless of age.

Foster carers who provide calm, supportive reassurance to the child and new parents provide a sound foundation and the best start to the new family. Remember that the relationship you achieved with the child will be with him or her for life and the lifestory work and memories you pass on will be priceless in years to come.

Sometimes foster carers keep a long term relationship with the child long after the child has moved on to an adoptive family. For other children, contact between the foster carers and the birth family, or new family, diminishes over time as the child moves on. Regardless of how long the relationship endures it is very important that contact is maintained in the days and months after placement, so that the child feels a real sense of continuity.

Very occasionally, foster carers might ask about adopting the child they have come to see as part of their family. This is a big step and one that can have a significant impact on finances (adoptive parents are generally financially responsible for their children) and is likely to affect your availability for fostering other children. Your social workers will help you think this through if a child in your care becomes in need of a permanent family, there are no alternative kinship care options and you feel you would like to be considered.

- **Continuing Care**

The Children and Young People's Act 2014 introduced "Continuing Care", which states that young people born after April 1999 may be able to extend their stay with their foster carer until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The aim of these changes is to provide these young people with a more graduated transition out of care, so that young people can further develop the necessary skills and be more emotionally ready to manage independent living.

- **After Care**

Some young people who are in foster care return to their own families before they reach adulthood. For others this is not possible, and they need help to make the difficult transition to independence.

East Lothian Council has social workers who support young people moving on from care, help to assess their needs and try to match them with a suitable

placement or accommodation. The young person and his/her social worker make plans and decisions about leaving care.

Supported accommodation or hostel places may be available for some, and you may be involved with workers from different settings who will help the young person to bridge the gap between living in care and living independently. Other young people may make their own arrangements by moving in with friends or finding their own accommodation.

Some young people want things that are not possible or available, and may find this hard to accept. Unfortunately, some young people leave their placement on an unplanned basis and set up house on their own or end up in bed and breakfast or with friends. The Local Authority still has a responsibility to support these young people and to continue supporting young people up to their 26<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Foster carers can have an important role in helping young people move on. Many carers continue informal contact with young people after they leave placement. If a Looked-after Review agrees that this support needs to be formalised, perhaps because the foster carer is providing a high level of support and the young person is particularly vulnerable, the carer can be supported financially.

Loneliness and isolation can be the most difficult part of leaving care for many young people. You may provide much needed support by just being on the end of a phone or visiting from time to time.

### **6.8 Unplanned Endings**

Sometimes placements will end unexpectedly or in an unplanned way. A parent may remove the child, for example, or a young person may run away, or an allegation may be made against you.

Sometimes, you will want to end the placement. You may be 'stuck' in your relationship with a particular child or his parents, or your own children may be experiencing distress of some sort. It is important in such cases that you talk together as a family and, with the help of your social worker, begin to identify what is happening. You may be helped to work through the difficulties.

Whenever possible, a planned ending of the placement will be in the child's best interests and you may be asked to 'hold on' until a suitable alternative is identified.

The child or young person might find it difficult to handle goodbyes. Young people can find it hard to show their feelings at the best of times and may be unable to say what they really feel about the placement ending.

Carers and their children can also be affected. An abrupt ending can leave carers feeling hurt and angry, and may feel that the placement has been

worthless. This is rarely the case, but it may be some time before feelings of rejection and disappointment fade.

When placements end in an unplanned way it can be very important for carers to have contact with the child. Children and young people can otherwise feel rejected, and this can compound earlier experiences they may have had. This follow up contact can be difficult for carers, particularly when children do not seem to respond to it, but it is important that we give children positive messages. Even when you have not had a particularly easy relationship with a child, you may find that you miss them. It may not always be appropriate to keep in touch when the child moves on, but photographs can act as important keepsakes.

### **6.9 End of Placement Reviews**

We will hold an 'end of placement' meeting with carers and the relevant social workers whenever a placement ends in an unplanned way, particularly if the child was placed on a long term or 'permanent' basis. This is so that everyone better understands what happened and can build this learning into plans for the child and future placements for carers. You will be involved in agreeing a suitable time frame. These meetings are about learning and not about apportioning blame.

# **Section 7**

## **Day to Day**

### **Fostering**



## Section 7 - Day to Day Fostering

This section covers some of the day to day work involved in fostering. It is beyond the scope of a handbook such as this to cover every aspect and your supervising social worker is available to offer advice and support as issues and questions arise.

### 7.1 Valuing Diversity

It is important that individuals or groups of individuals are valued and treated equally regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical or learning ability, religious or political beliefs or other ideology.

On a practical level, when a child comes to stay with you, check whether there are dietary differences between the child's family and your own, for example whether the child's family prefer a vegan or vegetarian diet or whether there are foods to which the young person is intolerant or allergic. Ask about their home-life, their routines and their family practices. Bath or shower? Light left on at night or door left open? Meals at table or on laps in front of the TV? Don't expect the young person to simply adapt to your family's way of doing things, or at least not right away. Consider how you can adapt your way of doing things to help the young person feel more at ease.

You may be asked to look after a child from a cultural or religious background that is different to your own. If this happens, ensure that you ask for advice and information about how best to support the young person. Examples might include making arrangements for the child to attend their place of worship or adapting family meals to accommodate the child's needs. For some children extra care may be needed to ensure their hair and skin are treated appropriately. Carers should help children to understand and take pride in their cultural heritage and feel comfortable about their origins.

Young people may have questions or concerns about their sexual orientation. Carers should offer guidance and information in a non-judgemental way and if appropriate seek advice from relevant organisations.

### 7.2 Training and Skills Development

Foster carers, like all professionals, must evidence their commitment to continuous learning and development. There are many ways this can be achieved, including through personal reading, attending formal training or through e-learning.

In East Lothian, we currently expect you to complete a minimum of 15 hours on formal development and learning over a two year period. Of this, five hours can be self-directed study and the remaining 10 hours from attending formal single or multiple agency training.

You must use your Learning Passport to record what you have learned and how you will use this to improve your practice as a foster carer. You will need to submit your Learning Passport at each foster carer review.

### **7.3 Support Groups** *(See also following section on 'confidentiality')*

Support groups are offered on a monthly basis. They offer a valuable, fairly informal opportunity for carers to share experiences and learn from one another. They can be a lifeline during periods of stress, help to reduce isolation and provide peer support as well as providing a venue to share ideas and views. Currently, there are three geographical groups across East Lothian.

At least one social worker from the Fostering Service is present to offer support in a variety of ways, not least ensuring that the venue is adequate, the crèche suitable and refreshments are provided.

Once or twice a year a support group for all carers is held and also social events, such as a summer BBQ and Christmas coffee morning.

### **7.4 Confidentiality & Managing Information**

The information contained in children's reports and the verbal information given to you about a child and his or her family is highly confidential. Most families have very mixed feelings when their children are accommodated, including that they have been required to share very private and painful details about their lives. They must feel confident that you will treat their personal information with respect.

#### **• What to tell friends and family**

Details about the child, their parents and family relationships must always be handled discreetly and should not be disclosed. Occasionally, some information, for example about a health matter, may have to be shared with close family or babysitters in order to ensure their own and the child's safety. Your supervising social worker should discuss this with you and you should be clear about what may be shared, with whom and why.

If anyone, including friends, family or neighbours, asks for information about the young person's circumstances then a polite but firm refusal to discuss the matter is usually sufficient. Being unable to share information with close family may be difficult for carers but it is possible to link in with other foster carers individually and at support groups, who are bound by the same requirements of confidentiality.

#### **• Information that must be shared**

Information that you receive from the young person or others about actual or potential harm to the child or another person must always be shared with a relevant social worker or social work manager as soon as possible. There must be no agreement between you and the young person (or anybody else) about keeping such information secret. If, therefore, you are told 'this is just

between you and me', you will have to explain that some information is so important that it must be shared with the family's social worker, who may well be able to help. You should also approach your own social worker when you feel you are being put in a difficult situation.

- **Storing and keeping records**

You must make satisfactory arrangements for storing information safely. You are advised to keep all reports and papers relating to individual children or fostering generally, such as your daily records and diaries, in a locked filing box or cabinet.

Emails exchanged with the child's social worker or your supervising social worker must not disclose the child's name or give personal information that might identify the child/family.

All papers must be returned to Children's Services at the end of a placement to ensure confidentiality.

Any data held electronically, such as emails between you and the social workers must be securely destroyed.

- **Information about you and your family**

Some basic information about you and your family will be shared with other professionals and with the child and his or her family. For example, a 'carer profile' form is required by a Children's Hearing when making a condition that the child must reside with you and a 'child friendly' profile is often shared with the young person prior to placement with you. You will be involved in preparing this sort of information and you will know what is being shared.

Information about you, such as reports written for approval or annual review papers are kept in a secure electronic file. You are at liberty to request access to your file apart from information supplied in confidence by a third party, such as your doctor, a referee or the police. There is a formal process to requesting access to your file but the initial request can be made through the Fostering Team Leader or Service Manager.

- **Confidentiality between Foster Carers**

Foster carers, and other professionals, must be respectful about children and their families:

- at carer support groups or training events;
- when carers meet informally with other carers;
- on social media sites such as Facebook (including 'closed' or 'private' groups).

Support groups and other informal meetings between carers can be helpful, providing an opportunity to speak about the child and share worries, ideas or

seek advice. They also provide an opportunity to 'let off steam' about the undoubted frustrations and challenges of fostering. You should however avoid making inappropriate or derogatory comments or sharing unnecessary information about a child, the child's plan or family's circumstances.

Similarly, carers sharing information about their own family must have confidence that what they share with another foster carer, or carers in a group, will not be shared with anyone else without their expressed consent.

- **Media Enquiries**

You must not give any information to, or have a discussion with, the press or media organisation about a child, other than where you have prior agreement from a Senior Manager from Children's Services. Any enquiries from the press must be referred immediately to your supervising social worker or the Fostering and Adoption Team duty senior, team leader or service manager.

Children placed with you may not be photographed by or featured in the press or other media unless their parents or the Head of Children's Services (if the Local Authority holds full parental Rights) has given permission.

## **7.5 Keeping Records**

(See also previous section on confidentiality).

Keeping a daily record of the work done with the child and his or her family is very important to evidence significant events in the child's life and thereby show patterns of behaviour over time, note progress or regression, assess the child's needs, contribute to life story work and contribute to future planning for the child.

Carers and social workers must think carefully about what they record about young people and their families. Legislation exists by which individuals can request access to their local authority records, including foster carers contributions. You should take account of that when recording and writing reports.

Always ensure that you work out with your supervising social worker what is appropriate to be recorded. This includes emailed information.

It is important to:

- Keep records short and up to date – take time each day so that events are fresh in your mind and as accurate as possible.
- Be clear about whether you are giving an opinion or recording facts.
- Sign and date your entries.
- Explain to the child that you are keeping records and the reason for this.

## **Where to Record and What to Record**

- a) Your foster carer diary, provided by your supervising SW, is solely used to note forthcoming appointments, for example, LAAC reviews, visits by parents, social workers. It should not be used to record information or details about a child.
- b) A Recording Folder is provided and should be used to record information when a significant event occurs.

Some examples of what to record:

- Accidents, illness dental appointments;
- Requests to any agency for help;
- Contact arrangements with the child's family or missed appointments;
- Reaction to contact with the family – the child's behaviour or if possible the child's words;
- Specific care arrangements for the child if staying with someone else;
- Things the child said that cause concern;
- Details of problem behaviour including what happened before and after the event;
- Important events or changes in circumstances;
- Details if the child goes missing and where they were found;
- Police involvement;
- Damage to property;
- Information from school;
- Attainments and achievements;
- Visits meetings and arrangements with social workers including Hearings and Reviews.

This sort of information is very important in cases of looked-after children, where there may be a disagreement between Children's Services and child's parents about future planning. The carer can also use this information when preparing reports for reviews of child's action plan.

You should also use the folder to:

- Record the amount of money spent on clothing for children in placement. It is important to keep a full and accurate record of money spent on clothing, along with receipts.
- Record your 'time out.'

Your supervising social worker is required to review your carer's records periodically.

## **7.6 Report Writing**

Carers are required to provide both verbal and written information in order to assist in planning for the child in their care. This can include reports for the Children's Hearing, Looked-After and Accommodated Children Reviews, the Adoption and Fostering Panel, as well as for their own annual reviews. You should be clear about whether you are giving an opinion or recording facts.

Keeping your daily records up to date will help when it comes to writing any form of requested report.

Where carers struggle with report writing skills, their supervising social worker can assist in completing the required forms. Carers are encouraged to take up training opportunities to improve their skills in this area and should seek the assistance of their supervising social worker to access such opportunities.

## **7.7 Contact with Birth Families**

Helping children to maintain contact with their birth family is one of the most important tasks carers are asked to do. It can also be one of the most difficult.

The Local Authority has a duty to promote contact between children and their parents, siblings, close family members and anyone with parental rights and responsibilities toward them. Nearly all children in foster care have contact with their families and many will return to their care in time.

If there are concerns about contact or the child's safety then the Sheriff or a Children's Hearing may make an order or set conditions about the contact, such as requiring this to be supervised or limited in frequency.

Contact is important because it can improve the child's emotional wellbeing when away from his or her family and increases the likelihood of a successful return home. It also provides a means to test out parents' skills and commitment where there have been concerns about this. Contact can include direct, face to face meetings, letters, phone calls, 'FaceTime', emails and other forms of social media. It may be supervised or unsupervised.

The frequency and location of contact will be discussed with you and you should make sure that you are clear about your role in contact. You may be asked to:

- Facilitate the contact by taking the child to contact or 'host' the contact in your home.
- Have a role in formally observing and recording what happens at contact.

Make sure that you are clear about your role when a child has contact, particularly where the contact is part of a formal parenting assessment process. For example, under what circumstances should you guide and

advise the parents during contact? Are you required to keep a detailed record about what happens during contact and do the child's parents understand this? Your supervising social worker and the child's social worker will be able to support you in this so that you are clear about:

- What to record, if required to do so;
- When to 'step in' if you become concerned;
- When to offer guidance and support to the parents.

Whatever form the contact takes, you should work to build up a working relationship with the child's birth family. You should be welcoming and give thought as to how to make the contact as positive as possible. Young parents may need help and support from carers about the physical needs of small children and how to play with them positively. They may need advice about how to manage certain behaviours. Other parents may feel your advice is unnecessary and resent any suggestion they need it.

Working alongside birth parents isn't always straightforward, particularly if you feel their behaviour is causing the child distress. Children can be very loyal to parents, even if they have been abused by them. A child's self-esteem can be badly damaged if they cannot retain a sense of the parent being a good person and he or she will need your help to manage this. It is crucial that you do not appear to judge or reject parents and that you promote good quality contact where this is part of the care plan.

- **When parents visit your home**

Unless contact is supervised, it is important that parents have an opportunity to be alone with their child. Visits may be timed so that the parent can put the child to bed or spend time together on homework or playing.

Do try to keep the child's family up to date about their child and what you've been doing together. If the plan is for the child to return home, it is essential that parents know what doctors, teachers and others have said about their child.

Sometimes contact is supervised as it has been determined that the child and parent should not be alone together. This may be because of concerns about possible harm that might arise for the child. These arrangements are made at Children's Hearings or reviews, but if you have any concerns about contact you should speak to your supervising social worker or the child's social worker straight away.

If you are asked to supervise contact within your home you must be clear about your role and know how to seek support when needed. Talk to the

child's and your supervising social worker so that you, and the child's parents, understand what is expected of you during the contact.

- **When parents miss visits**

Sometimes parents can be unreliable about visits. If this is happening, you need to ensure that the child's expectations are realistic, for example: "your mum said she'd try to come today, but she's got a lot on so might not manage it. If she doesn't come we'll go out and do something else."

Many children feel it is somehow their fault when a parent lets them down. It is important that the child is helped not to feel guilty in such a situation. It is crucial that you find ways of handling your own feelings on these occasions. Negative comments should not be made about the parent because this forces the child into impossible choices of loyalty.

- **Tensions between parents and children**

There can be tensions between parents and children, particularly teenagers. The child's social worker has a key role in trying to help with these but sometimes foster carers can have the role of peacemaker and go-between. Sometimes, a child may refuse to see his or her parents. Although the child's views must be respected, carers have a key role in helping the child to understand the family's situation better so that contact can resume.

- **If a parent asks for the immediate return of his/her child**

Very rarely a parent will ask a foster carer for the immediate return of the child. The care plan will indicate whether the parent has a right to care for the child. Even if they do have a right, you should discuss the situation with your supervising social worker or the child's worker or phone the Emergency Care Service (ECS) before handing over the child or contact a relevant social worker immediately if the parent has removed the child or fails to return the child. When a child has been accommodated for six months or more, a parent is required to notify the Council in writing, giving notice of their intention of removing the child.

## **7.8 Lifestory work and memory keeping**

Children who are looked after and have experienced a succession of moves during childhood often struggle to make sense of their identity as they have little information about past events and the reasons things happened.

Children may have only a vague or even an inaccurate understanding of why they are fostered; many think that it is their fault that they are no longer living with their birth family or believe that they are not wanted. Often they do not have the understanding that their birth family lacked the skills to keep them safe, healthy and nurtured.

Children may have few or no photos of themselves or family or mementoes from their time before becoming fostered, particularly if there has been a



history of crises and trauma. Some children have gaps or no record of previous times in foster care, particularly if they have had a number of moves. This too can lead to a fragmented sense of self, and can contribute to feelings of low self-esteem and lack of belonging.

Life Story Work plays a key role in helping children to piece together their story, to dispel 'magical thinking' and to ensure the child builds a sense of his or her identity.

The child's social worker has the lead role in ensuring lifestory work is available at a level appropriate to the child's age and stage. Foster carers, however, also have an important role in safeguarding children's memories through keeping a detailed record of the child's time in placement. This includes taking photographs and keeping mementos that track the time spent with the fostering family.

- Ask the child's parents, or their social worker for photos of the child's parents/ key family members.
- It may be comforting for the child to have a photo of his/her mum/dad on display in your home. There is however a note of caution here: first discuss with the child's SW whether the child would be helped by seeing a particular family member's picture or whether this could be traumatic, for instance if there are concerns about the child having been abused by that person.
- Keep a photographic record of the child's life, progress and development during his or her time in your care. Take photos regularly, at least once a month and more often than that at times of rapid change (babyhood, the toddler stage or the teenage years) and at significant occasions and events.
- In this era of digital photos, it is important that you and the relevant social workers agree a way of keeping copies (ideally in a photo album and backed up electronically). Please remember to record the dates, names and places in the photos so that in years to come the child and/or his family can easily tell who's who.
- Don't forget to take pictures of the child's favourite toys and games as these can be lost or forgotten during moves.
- With their parents' agreement, please include photos of the child's friends.
- Keep a "memory box" for the child: your social worker can help you decide what to keep if you are not sure. Items might include tickets from a day out or holiday, programmes from events the child enjoyed, a

comforter or blanket, outgrown clothes given by a parent – the list is endless and will vary according to the child's interests and circumstances.

- You should keep report cards from school and nursery, maybe a painting or drawings by the child, cards they received at birthdays and Christmas and so on.
- Display photos of the child in your home, particularly if you have photos of your own children and grandchildren on display.
- Keep a record of developmental milestones – when he cut his first tooth, when she first rode a bike, illnesses or hospital visits.
- Record anecdotes about the child, funny incidents, contact with family.
- Keep details of holidays or events where the child was with you or your family.

You must pass all these on to the young person or whoever is going to look after the child when he or she leaves your care, whether that is the birth family, kinship carers, other foster carers or adoptive parents.

### **7.9 Working as part of a Team**

It is important that foster carers work in partnership with the child's parents, social workers and others involved in the child's plan, such as health professionals or teachers. Foster carers need to be well organised and able to attend frequent appointments and meetings, communicate effectively and understand complex information. Carers need to demonstrate that they can sustain working relationships with professionals, advocate for their children's needs and accept support when needed.

The final responsibility for the child's Care Plan lies with Children's Services but foster carers make many day-to-day decisions. If you are in any doubt about whether you have the authority to make a particular decision about a child, then you should check either with the child's social worker or your supervising social worker. Decisions that look straightforward may have complex repercussions if they are not carefully thought through. The following examples illustrate this.

1. **A 13-year-old child in foster care wants to spend the night with a friend.** While supporting as 'normal' a lifestyle as possible for your foster child, you will need to ensure that the families of friends visited, particularly overnight, are safe. Where possible, check with your child's social worker or your supervising social worker.
2. **The child requires emergency medical treatment.** Carers normally have parental consent for this, but you should keep parents and

social workers informed when possible. In situations where for any reason such consent has not yet been attained, the child's need for urgent medical attention must take precedence, and steps taken to notify the child's worker or the Emergency Care Service as soon as possible.

3. **A child needs a haircut.** Carers would normally have the authority for this if the child is in full-time care, but you should be sensitive about the views of parents. Parents can object to certain styles of cut.
4. **Purchase of clothing.** Carers are given an allowance for this, but need to be sensitive to the choices of children and the views of parents.

### **7.10 Shaping and Modelling Behaviour**

See also 'Guidelines for Care and Control in Foster Care (Information for carers)' in the appendices of this handbook.

Caring for someone else's child is a relatively public activity and it can sometimes feel like living in a goldfish bowl. There is a shared accountability between carers and Children's Services in terms of how children in care are disciplined. We expect carers to be able to work within these principles.

Children in foster care should never be subjected to smacking or other forms of physical punishment. The policy of non-physical punishment also provides some protection for carers, who might be accused of physical abuse.

Foster carers should not attempt to restrain young people, except for those occasions when small children may need to be physically held to protect them from danger or from causing harm to other people or property. (See appendix for fuller discussion and guidelines).

It is important that children in your care, and their parents, know what to expect from you. Carers should always try to use positive methods to change the pattern of unacceptable behaviours or attitudes. There may be a benefit in the experience of non-punitive discipline being passed on to the child and their parents for the future.

The behaviour of some children can be very difficult or confusing and it can be hard for carers to know where to start. Tackling something that you have a reasonable chance of 'winning on' is a good way to begin, as this can have a 'ripple effect', encouraging both you and the child to move on to other problem areas. It is important that you pass on these breakthroughs to the family or to other carers, if the child moves on. They may be small steps but important nonetheless. If, for example, you have found a way of washing

a child's hair that does not end in tears and tantrums, don't keep it to yourself!

Understanding why children behave in certain ways is crucial. Many accommodated children have had very unhappy, mixed-up and sometimes violent early lives. Some of them have been let down by adults many times and they are not used to the normal give-and-take of family life. They may have suffered from their parents' inconsistency – one minute ignoring bad behaviour, and the next going 'over the top' about a minor fault. It is little wonder that some children end up behaving badly. Ironically, they are often at their worst with the very people who are trying hardest to help them.

Both your social worker and the child's worker will help with advice and support, but they won't be around all the time. There will be moments in the life of every carer when the child will try him or her to the limit, or will do something really dangerous or destructive. If you feel you are being provoked towards an extreme reaction, please ask for help in good time. It doesn't follow automatically that the child will be removed if you think you have mishandled a situation and it is much more likely that everyone will try to help relieve the strain by suggesting other ways of coping. You will get support from your social worker, but do not underestimate the value of speaking with other carers. We have a number of experienced carers who are happy to be available to other carers at any point where support might be needed. Ask your social worker to put you in touch.

Foster carers are provided with training to help manage challenging behaviour and provided with the Fostering Network's "Managing Challenging Behaviour" book as part of the post approval training programme.

### **7.11 Smart Phones, Tablets, TV and Laptops**

These devices are all part of everyday life for children; many young children have no memory of a time when it wasn't so. Many children, even toddlers, enjoy playing interactive games or listening to books and music. It is the preferred means of communication and socialising for many teenagers. Young people are expected to use on-line searches to complete homework projects and having these skills is probably as essential as reading and writing.

There can sometimes be a skills gap between young people and the adults who look after them, so it is important to pay particular attention to young people's on-line use to ensure they are aware of the risks and have the support needed to protect themselves from harmful materials and contacts.

You should have regular, open discussions with young people in your care about staying safe when on line.

Television use should also be monitored to ensure that inappropriate programmes are not being accessed. Children rarely need to have a TV in their bedroom and there is evidence to suggest this is disruptive to sleep. Similarly, children old enough to have a smart phone or tablet should switch it off and not take it with them when they go to bed.

(See also section 7.12 for advice on Internet Safety).

### **7.12 Social Media and Foster Carers**

Foster Carers must be vigilant and ensure that no one within the carers' immediate family or wider circle posts photos or other information about a child in placement (or their family) on any social network site i.e. Facebook or similar.

### **7.13 Internet Safety**

See also TFN publication "Safer Caring – a New Approach", chapter 10, 'Safer Caring in a digital world'

For many young people and adults, the internet is part of daily life. It is used for education, entertainment, as a source of news and for social opportunities. It is available at school, in the home, at their friends, in libraries - in fact just about anywhere with access to a smart phone. So what can we do to help protect children online?

Foster carers have a responsibility to help young people stay safe on line and use internet access responsibly but absolute protection is unlikely to be achievable. Openness and good communication is the best way to help young people keep themselves safe. East Lothian Council can provide training and advice about safe social networking and online access. Ask your supervising social worker for further information or use the following links:

<https://www.internetmatters.org>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>

### **7.14 Supporting Education**

Children who have become 'looked after' often fall well short of achieving their full educational potential. The reasons for this may include a lack of encouragement, stress due to his or her home circumstances or other worries, and disrupted education. We all need to help children to become equipped for adult life by ensuring good attendance at school, a positive attitude and support through difficulties.

We try to ensure that children cared for by foster carers stay at the same school if possible. This can sometimes mean quite lengthy journeys to school but this is usually less disruptive for a child than a change of school. The question of which school a child should attend should be addressed before

the placement starts and the child's educational needs will be reviewed on a regular basis. If a child needs to be enrolled at the local school, the foster carer will normally do this, but this should be confirmed with the social worker.

Foster carers should keep in close contact with the school and act as a good parent would in terms of attending parents' evenings, supervising homework, giving praise and encouragement and taking up any issues or worries the child has about school. A guide for carers supporting children with homework can be found in the appendices.

The child's social worker should be kept informed of the child's progress and consulted if there are any problems. If the child is truanting from school, the foster carer should contact the social worker and the school immediately to look at ways of tackling this.

In liaising with the school, it is useful to remember that schools are now required to have a nominated teacher with specific responsibility for Looked After Children who will be able to help and support.

Foster carers can usually give consent for children to attend school trips and outings but the social worker should be approached if overnight stays are involved.

Young children should be read to frequently and encouraged to draw, paint and write. Older children should be encouraged to read and use the local library. Children should also be supported to engage with out-of-school activities and carers should actively seek out opportunities in their local community to promote such involvement in line with their children's needs/talent and interests.

### **7.15 Health and Wellbeing**

Your social worker can provide you with an NHS Health Information pack for carers and Fostering Network Guidance, both of which contain useful advice about the health needs of Looked After Children.

The LAC nurse will contact carers when a child is first accommodated. Young people who are accommodated may have very poor history of healthcare and little recorded health history. A comprehensive initial health assessment provides a base from which to plan and implement the appropriate care and support children need to achieve their potential.

The LAC nurse collates health information from various sources within the health service to produce an up-to-date picture of the young person's health, identify any areas where health has been neglected and initiate any referrals for further treatment.

- **Doctors and Dentists**

When a child starts in placement with you, please check with the child's social worker about what needs to be done about registering the child with a local GP and dentist. Together, and with the child's parents, you can decide whether new arrangements need to be made for the child so that they can use your local surgery and dentist. You may find that they are already registered locally and can remain with their own GP and dentist.

Dental health and hygiene is very important and may be something that the child needs help with. Please try to encourage good habits by making sure that the child brushes their teeth regularly, doesn't eat too many sweets and cakes, and has six-monthly check-ups at the dentist.

- **Healthy eating**

Some children will not have much experience of healthy eating and may need a bit of encouragement with fresh fruit and vegetables, pulses and grains. They may not be used to regular mealtimes, either. Please try to ease them into better eating habits if you can – as you know, it will make a difference to their physical and mental health. When they first come to stay, you might want to try to give them food that they are used to. But, unless they have special dietary needs, once they settle in encourage them to eat the same food as you. Please do remember that children from different cultural and religious backgrounds may have particular dietary needs too. Talk it over with the child's social worker if you have any worries or problems.

- **Mental health problems/drugs/alcohol**

If you have any concerns that the child you are looking after is having mental health problems, please discuss it with the child's social worker straightaway, and together you can sort out what you need to do in terms of seeing the child's GP and talking to the child's school. You may also want to inform the child's birth parents. There are support groups and other help available – we'll help you to get as much support as possible. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) offer a consultation service for carers; ask your social worker for more details if you would like to discuss your concerns about the child.

If you think the child has a problem with alcohol, drugs or other substances, talk to the child's social worker straightaway. It's very important to tackle these problems early. Again, together you may decide to talk to the child's GP, school and, if appropriate, birth parents. There are support groups and other help available - the social worker will give you more information and support.

You can visit [www.meldap@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:www.meldap@eastlothian.gov.uk) for further information about drug and alcohol services in East Lothian.

Information about HIV and Hepatitis C can be accessed through:  
[www.waverleycare.org/content/aboutshivhepatitisc/112](http://www.waverleycare.org/content/aboutshivhepatitisc/112)

- **Consent for medical treatment**

This is quite a tricky area. Who can give consent and when depends on the age of the child, who has 'care and control' of the child and whether it is an emergency or routine situation.

When a child begins a placement with you, we will ask you to sign a placement agreement. The parents also usually sign a Consent to Medical Treatment form. This outlines who has consent and when and what for. For example, if the birth parents retain consent, then they would be able to refuse medical procedures that are desirable but not essential (elective, for example, having tonsils removed), preventative (for example, immunisations), or cosmetic (for example, teeth straightening.) However, in cases where refusal would result in significant harm to the child, the council could take legal steps to try to authorise the treatment.

The general rule is that if you have 'care and control' of a child, you have a duty to do all that is reasonable in all circumstances to safeguard the child's health. If, while you are looking after the child, medical treatment is needed, you can consent to treatment if:

- the child cannot give his/her own consent or refusal and
- you do not know that the birth parent would refuse such treatment

If you know that the birth parent would refuse a particular treatment for their child, please contact the child's social worker or duty social worker immediately to see what steps need to be taken. (Treatments likely to be refused should be outlined in the Medical Consent Agreement signed at the beginning of the placement).

In an emergency, if for example, the child's condition was serious or life threatening, and there is no one available to provide consent, then a doctor may provide treatment regardless of consent.

- **Age of medical consent**

The law says that any person over 16 can consent to or refuse medical treatment. Young people under the age of 16 can consent or refuse medical treatment if the doctor taking care of them feels that the child is capable of understanding what might happen if s/he refuses or consents to a treatment. If you disagree with the child/young person's decision, please contact the child's social worker at once, so that you can discuss matters; if necessary the council can go to court.

*Please note: if the child you are caring for requires any major treatment, whether consent is an issue or not, please contact the child's social worker or duty social worker immediately and keep them informed of what is happening.*



## **Children who receive long-term medical treatment**

Some children have long-term health issues, for example, diabetes. You will only be asked to look after children with health issues if you are willing to do so and we are happy that you are able to. At the beginning of your placement, you and the child's social worker and a health worker should meet to discuss medication, diet and general care. You may choose to foster someone with HIV, AIDS or hepatitis. Whatever health issues someone has, we hope that you will treat them as you would any other child, and remember that they have the same needs for fun, affection, security and support.

**NB:** A Guidance note on the storage and management of medication is included within the appendices and should be referred to at all times.

### **7.16 Sleep Problems**

Many young people in foster care report difficulty in sleeping.

Guidance and support can be obtained about sleep problems through the LAAC nurse or GP. Sleep Scotland gives advice on the management of children's sleeping difficulties. Carers can help through developing good bed-time routines that aim to quieten and soothe the child, including avoiding 'screens' (phones, tablets TV) immediately before sleep.

### **7.17 Children with Disabilities**

Children who have disabilities or long-term health needs should have the same opportunities for family life, leisure, fun, affection, support, education, employment, health and security and should be treated the same as any other child.

The child's social worker, carer's Social worker and the carers should ensure that:

- Care needs are clearly detailed in the child's Support Plan or All About Me;
- There is a Keeping me Safe and Well plan in place, including intimate care and support;
- There are opportunities for the carer to meet with appropriate medical staff if appropriate;
- Plans are in place to provide any specialist training the carer needs to look after the child;
- Adaptations and aids that are essential are supplied;
- Advice is available from someone who knows the child;
- Information about the full range of support from local services and support groups is available to the carer.

### **7.18 Preparing for Adulthood**

Young people who are in their teens often need carers who can look after them until they reach the stage of independent living. Some, due to trauma

they have experienced or limited opportunities to develop, may seem younger than their actual age. They may struggle to regulate their behaviour and need patience and guidance to help them develop in this area.

Patience is needed in working on practical matters, such as staying out, handling money, developing domestic skills and generally negotiating the adult world. The foster carer's task is to help equip the young person with skills to move into adulthood, while the young person's social worker helps with future accommodation and other matters.

Young people can be very vulnerable and are much more likely to be homeless, unemployed, exploited and get in to trouble than young people who have the support of their own families.

The task of preparing an older teenager for independent living when they leave care can be daunting. 'Going it alone' at the age of 16 or 17 can be both exciting and overwhelming. We need to help prepare them, stage by stage, for life in an adult world, by giving them an increasing responsibility for decision making for themselves.

There may be a lot to help a young person with, but if placed as a teenager, very little time to accomplish the tasks. You will be encouraging the young person to settle into your family while at the same time helping him/her prepare for moving out to live alone. This poses a very real challenge.

You may be asked to teach a young person to take care of him/herself by leaving them to wash and iron their own clothes, cook some meals and handle their own money. This can be hard work, particularly if your advice is ignored, but it can be an important part of the placement plan.

The young person may see 'leaving care' as a goal in itself, and may find it hard to accept any of your help. This can be frustrating for carers, but it needs to be remembered that the young people in our care are young adults who have rights they may wish to exercise independently of you and others who are supporting them. We can only hope that the young person can take with them some of what they have learned from you into independence, and that it will help them survive out there on their own. It may only be years later that you learn how the help you have given them has made the difference between coping and not coping.

# **Section 8**

# **Child Protection**

## Section 8 - Child Protection

Everyone has a responsibility to make sure that children are safe and well cared for. Child abuse is much more than physical abuse. It also includes emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

### 8.1 Child Protection and Foster Care

If you have a child protection concern about a child in your care you must report this immediately to the child's social worker or team leader. Social work staff and police may investigate these concerns and may speak with the child and any relevant people such as teachers, health visitor or the carer. They will also discuss with health staff whether a medical examination is needed. If so, the child will be examined by a paediatrician to make sure there are no injuries or other problems such as poor growth or infections that require treatment. In some cases a police doctor may be present. Any injuries may be photographed by the police for evidence. The investigation will be carried out in a sensitive manner with the child's safety and wellbeing as the most important consideration.

If the child you are concerned about is not in your care then you should contact Children's Services Duty Service at 01875 8240309 or the Emergency Care Service (out of hours team).

### 8.2 Responding to a child's disclosure of abuse

Many children placed with carers have experienced serious abuse in the past. Often it is only when the child feels safe that he or she starts to talk about it. If a child starts to talk to you about having been abused it is vital that you:

- Stop what you are doing and take the child aside to have a quiet talk. You may be the first person that the child has felt able to confide in;
- Listen carefully rather than ask questions. Do not ask any leading questions such as, 'did (this or that person) hurt you?';
- Show that you are taking what the child is saying seriously;
- Tell the child he or she is not to blame and that they were brave to speak up;
- Make it clear that you will need to pass the information on to the social worker;
- Write down what has been said as soon as possible using the child's exact words.

It is important that you do not attempt to interview or question the child as, if this is done in the wrong way, it could interfere with the formal process of gathering information needed for potential Court proceedings.

You must inform the child's social worker or line manager as soon as possible, i.e. the same day or next available working day.

The disclosure/allegation of abuse will be considered in accordance with the Edinburgh and Lothian's Inter Agency Child Protection Procedures.

You may find it helpful to share the feeling evoked by the disclosure with your social worker or your worker can link you with an experienced foster carer.

### **8.3 Working with children who may have been physically and sexually abused**

Caring for abused children brings special challenges, as often they behave very differently from what you may be used to. You will have focused on this during your initial and subsequent training, but it is important always to keep in mind the possibility of abuse.

We do not necessarily know details of a child's past when they are first accommodated. Some children need to feel safe before they can tell someone what has happened to them. Or the child may have no words for what they experienced and his or her behaviour might be the only means available to communicate this.

Although all forms of abuse are distressing and damaging to children, sexual abuse brings very special problems to the child, birth family and carers. You may find it helpful to prepare yourself for placements that involve these issues by consulting experienced social workers and fellow carers, and reading some of the wealth of relevant material available.

Working with children who behave in a sexualised way is never easy. It will be important to consider the underlying reasons for such behaviour in a family environment. Your help will also be crucial in encouraging the young people in your care to build up self-respect and a positive image of themselves.

Your Safer Caring Plan must be updated regularly and take account of new information or behaviours and the child's development.

### **8.4 Serious incidents and accidents**

Any serious incidents or accidents that involve a young person must be reported (email or phone call) to his or her social; worker, line manager, duty worker or if out of hours, the Emergency Care Service. You must do this as soon as possible, for example once the young person's medical needs have been attended to or the police informed if the child is missing.

A serious incident includes when a young person:

- Runs away;
- Commits an offence;
- Is hospitalised or requires to attend hospital or a GP or other health professional following an injury;

- Suffers or discloses any form of abuse;
- Any other event that you regard as serious.

Your supervising social worker and/or the child's social worker may be asked to investigate the incident further, record their findings and report back to the Team Leader/Service Manager, who will decide whether further action is required. All significant incidents and accidents are reported to the Care Inspectorate by the Fostering Team Leader/Service Manager.

### **8.5 Children who are absent or missing**

Please also refer to Briefing note 'Missing Young Persons with Significant Health Needs – Learning from Initial Case Review' within the Appendices.

Occasionally children go missing from foster care placements. Some may fail to return when expected or perhaps leave the carer's home without permission and without saying where they are going. The possibility that a child may come to harm while absent is a real concern.

There are many reasons why a child may be absent or missing. There may have fallen out with friends, family or with the carers; they may want to be with family or friends. They may be attracted to street life and to people who may present a risk, they may be being bullied, at risk of physical or sexual abuse or unhappy at being in foster care.

There will be some whose absence is immediately worrying and others where a longer absence may not be so worrying. The age and maturity of the child and the child's history will have a bearing on this.

You must always report any missing child or young person to the child's social worker or the Emergency Care Service (ECS), whatever the level of concern surrounding the disappearance.

At this point a decision will be taken jointly with the carer about whether this is an "unauthorised absence" (which does not require to be reported immediately to the police) or whether the child should be considered "missing".

- **Unauthorised Absence**

Where the child's social worker/ECS worker and carer jointly agree that there are good grounds to believe a child's absence is careless or deliberate, and there is no apparent risk to the child and/or public, no immediate report needs to be made to the Police.

Such absences will be noted in writing by Children's Services or 'out of hours' social worker. The social worker will agree with the carers what immediate actions are required to locate the child, will identify a point in time where it

would be appropriate to report the child to the police as a missing person and agree who will do this.

In all cases, if a child is still absent when six hours have elapsed, the child's social worker or ESC worker must report to the police that the child is missing.

- **Missing**

Where a child's location or reason for absence is unknown and/or there is cause for concern for a child because of his/her vulnerability, or where there is potential danger to the public, the young person must be considered to be 'missing'. Any child or young person in this category must be reported to the police by the child's social worker/ECS worker. The social worker will agree a level of risk with the Police, having previously discussed this with the carers.

In assessing the significance of a child's absence with the social worker, carers should take account of anything already agreed in the child's care plan, as well as:

- the age and legal status of the child
- previous behaviour and history, including the influence of peer groups or others, and whether the child is likely to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances
- any variation in his/her mood or if s/he has expressed any intention to self-harm or to harm others
- if the child is perceived to be running to or running from someone or something
- the risk of offending
- the risk that the child may be targeted for sexual exploitation
- the prevailing weather conditions

### **8.6 Follow-up action on the return of a child**

When the young person returns you should try to establish how they are and if they have been harmed in any way. They may be hungry, cold and exhausted. At this time it is generally better to tend to their physical needs and tell them how happy you are that they are safe than to respond with advice or anger.

Subsequently the social worker and police will decide who will complete a return interview with the young person. If there is reason to suspect/ believe that the child has been abused, exploited, or suffered harm, then the Child Protection Procedures should immediately be consulted and followed.

# **Section 9**

# **Payments to Foster**

# **Carers**



## Section 9 - Payments to Foster Carers

This section covers allowances, other payments and financial matters.

### 9.1 Administration of Payments

Fees are paid one month in advance. Carers will therefore be in credit to the Council. This means that if the fostering allowance is late in arriving, because a child was placed after a payment date for instance, the advanced fee can be used to off-set this until the allowance arrives, so that the carer is not financially disadvantaged. In an emergency, new carers can be paid fostering allowance and fees on a **weekly** basis until the next monthly payment period, so that they are not out of pocket.

If you receive payment that you are not entitled to, the Council would prefer it if this could be repaid straight away. However, if this would cause you severe inconvenience large overpayments can be spread over a period of time.

Fees are processed on a four-weekly cycle. Payments for fees and fostering allowance are paid directly in to carers' bank accounts. A monthly statement is sent to carers that explains how the figures for fees and maintenance were calculated. Any queries about this should be made to - The Fostering & Adoption Service Administrator (on Tel: **01620 827105**) or your supervising social worker. Alternatively contact the duty worker (01620827643) or by email –fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk

### 9.2 Income Tax and National Insurance

Foster carers are regarded as self-employed and as such are responsible for completing a self-assessment form, which can be obtained from the Inland Revenue. You can be fined if you are liable to pay income tax and do not register for self-assessment.

You can find guidance about tax rules that apply to income received as a foster carer online at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net).

Please note that foster carers are responsible for ensuring they have independent financial advice pertaining to their self-employed status. It is very important that carers retain their remittance advice each month to assist with the preparation of tax returns. Copies of the remittance advice are not kept by the Council.

### National Insurance Contributions

You should check with your local social security office about NIC payments. Registration is required even if you are exempt from income tax. Foster carers who wish to protect their state pension or other benefits should consider paying a self-employed contribution even in your earnings are above the threshold.

Advice should be sought from the Self- Employment helpline: 0845 915 4655  
Further information about tax and National Insurance is available from HMRC at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) or by calling 0300 200 3310.

HMRC also provide a free eLearning module specifically for foster carers at:  
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/courses/syob2/fc/index.htm>

### **9.3 The Fostering Allowance**

The Fostering Allowance is intended to cover the costs incurred through looking after the child. It is paid 4 weekly and is paid in advance.

The Standard Fostering Allowance has three elements:

- A. Maintenance – the costs involved in looking after the child (the basic allowance)
- B. Clothing and Lifestyle Money (CLM)
- C. Pocket Money

Short Breaks/Respite Carers receive the Basic Allowance but not CLM or pocket money for the child.

#### **A) The Maintenance Element**

The maintenance element is for the everyday costs incurred in caring for the young person and is therefore only payable when the young person is in placement.

The maintenance part of the allowance is for (but is not limited to):

- Extra fuel costs within the home;
- Household equipment and furnishings (other than loaned equipment);
- Home contents and insurance costs including additional car insurance;
- Standard and special dietary food requirements;
- All basic toiletries including basic skin and hair products;
- Haircuts;
- Standard educational resources – including resources for homework and study, sports clothing and equipment;
- Play/toddler group / nursery fees;
- Religious needs including travel to places of worship;
- Reasonable use of the carers' phone for calls to family and friends (or pre-agreed level of 'top up' for the young person's phone);
- Recreational outings (including travel and entrance costs);
- Cinema and theatre tickets;
- Leisure activities – travel to and from, club memberships, fees and special kit;
- Routine transport costs - everyday travel as part of family life including to and from school as necessary, for family contact, shopping trips, outings, bus and train fares;
- Toys, books and games as age appropriate;

- Basic holiday expenses;
- Extra decorating expenses;
- Bus fares for young people able to self-travel as agreed within the child's plan. Local journeys to see family and friends/attend college would normally be paid from the allowance but there will be variation according to whether the placement is near or further away from friends and family. Variation should be agreed at the placement planning meeting and subsequent reviews.

If a young person goes home overnight on a regular basis, a proportion of the maintenance is paid. If a young person is with you for part of a day the allowance is not affected. Thus, if a young person goes home a Friday and returns to you on a Monday, you will receive maintenance payments for the Friday and Monday but not the Saturday and Sunday. You will, however, receive the full allowance for clothing, lifestyle (CLM) and pocket money if you remain responsible for providing this to the young person.

### **B) Clothes and Lifestyle Money (CLM)**

The recommended amount of CLM is set down in the payments leaflet issued to carers.

How the CLM is spend is largely a matter of judgement between you, the young person and his or her social worker, but must be openly discussed and kept under review from the moment the young person arrives in placement until he or she leaves. Openness and transparency are essential to avoid any misunderstanding about how the CLM is spent. Any unspent CLM should be returned at the end of the placement.

- The Clothing element

All young people should be adequately clothed when they are first accommodated; the child's social worker can, if necessary, apply for an Initial Clothing Grant. We should, however, be wary of providing large amounts of expensive clothing that his or her parents would be unable to provide, particularly in the early stages of placement. Young children in particular may get comfort from wearing familiar clothes when they first come to foster carers.

You should ensure that clothing is replaced and renewed when needed. You may, however, agree to set aside some of the money for future spends (such as for a more expensive winter jacket or additional sports kit).

You should make an inventory of clothing when a young person arrives or leaves so that his or her clothing needs can be assessed and disputes avoided. It is expected that the young person will have adequate clothing when he or she leaves your care.

Exceptionally, a one-off payment may be considered for expensive items e.g. if the child is taking part in a religious ceremony or family wedding or similar. Such needs must be discussed with the child's social worker and your supervising SW in advance.

Keep receipts (until your social worker has confirmed seeing these) and keep a record of all clothes purchased for the child in your carer folder. Your social worker will check these from time to time. This is so that when children move on or return home there can be no suggestion that the clothing money wasn't spent appropriately. It is a safe guard for you.

- Lifestyle element

The allowance available to spend on clothes is generous because some young people are 'heavy' on clothing and shoes – out growing, outwearing or losing them. The young person must be adequately and appropriately clothed, but carers should not spend money on clothing that is not needed.

Money that is not required for clothes can be used to support the young person's lifestyle choices.

Examples of this could include buying additional phone top ups, make-up, downloads and games, spray tans and so on. The young person may ask for more expensive clothing brands, or for prefer to have their own luxury toiletries or expensive hair treatments.

Alternatively, following discussion with the young person and his or her SW, surplus CLM could go toward saving for, or topping up, the cost of buying a bike, a laptop or whatever seems appropriate. Or a young person may want to attend additional activities over and above what the carer is already covering from the Fostering Allowance.

The way in which CLM is spent will vary according to the young person's age, circumstances and personal choices and so a young person who chooses to have some more expensive clothes/branded labels or luxury toiletries will, for example, have less available for other lifestyle choices.

Keep a record of how the Lifestyle element is spent, so it can be accounted for and confusion or misunderstanding avoided.

### **C) Pocket Money**

Recommended figures are given as to how much pocket money a young person might receive at a given age, but the issue is complex. We need to be cautious about giving young people pocket money that is very different from what they received or will receive from their parents. It is also unfair if fostered young people receive more or less than their foster carers' own children, particularly where their ages are similar. For these reasons, if the recommended pocket money exceeds the child's needs, following

discussion with the child and the child's social worker, some of it can be put towards savings or put toward the cost of additional recreational, sports or leisure activities (that are over and above what the carer provides from the basic maintenance element).

There may be overlap between the CLM and pocket money. A young person who has no surplus CLM for a particular item (such as an expensive brand of shampoo they want to try) may elect to use some of his or her pocket money for that rather than use what's available to the rest of the household. Some young people may want to save a portion of their pocket money so they have extra to spend on treats when on holiday.

The way in which pocket money will be allocated should always be agreed and recorded at the earliest review after the child's placement begins (and amended as necessary at or prior to subsequent reviews).

Young people, particularly those who are in settled placements, should be encouraged to save and open savings accounts or bank accounts.

### **Reviewing the use of CLM and Pocket Money**

It is important that young people and their parents understand how CLM and pocket money is allocated, to ensure there is openness and transparency. The LAC Review should always consider this issue but any disagreement or concerns should be addressed by those supporting the plan whenever these arise i.e. not wait for the LAC Review.

## **9.4 Additional Allowances**

- **Birthday Allowance**

The equivalent to one week's standard rate allowance is paid to the carer annually in advance of the child's birthday. This is intended to cover the cost of a gift and small celebration. Carers may, following discussion with the SW and with agreement, hold back a portion of the birthday allowance and put toward a later 'spend' if the child does not need the full allowance spent on a birthday. It is important that you keep a careful record of such decisions.

- **'Christmas' Allowance**

Carers receive the equivalent of one week's standard rate allowance four weeks prior to Christmas (or other religious festival) to cover the cost of a gift for each child placed. As with the birthday allowance, you should discuss whether the child needs the full amount spent at this time or whether a portion may be held back for alternative use at a later time.

- **Holiday Activities Allowance**

The equivalent of two weeks allowance at the standard rate is paid annually for each child placed. This is intended to cover the additional costs of travel, outings, trips, activities and treats incurred during school holiday periods.

Examples will include extra travel costs (bus fares or mileage), entry/ticket costs to the cinema or theme park and similar; you should budget for these across the year.

The use of the Holiday Activities Allowance should be recorded and regularly reviewed with your supervising social worker.

Short Break/Respite Carers who are looking after a child during the main carer's time out are not paid the holiday activities/birthday/December allowances. Therefore, whenever a respite carer is looking after a child over a birthday or festive period, the main carer should ensure the gift and, if relevant, the cost of a small celebration is passed on the respite carer.

Carers who have respite from the young person during school breaks should keep back a portion of the Holiday Activities Allowance to pass on the carer who is looking after the child during that period. There will need to be discussion between carers and social workers, therefore, about the portion of Holiday Activities Allowance due to the respite carer whenever a young person has respite during the holiday periods. Only if the main carer can fully and reasonably account for the Holiday Activities Allowance may the respite carer request a proportionate "top up" for identified and agreed additional costs of having a child placed over the holiday period.

### **9.5 Other Expenses Payments**

Occasionally exceptional payments for special items can be paid. Such needs should be discussed with the child's social worker. Examples:

- **Equipment/Hobbies**

The Fostering Allowance should cover all sports, hobbies, tuition and so on for the child. If, however, the child has an expensive interest or wishes to undertake a course of tuition, for example, piano lessons or horse riding, then an additional discretionary payment may be considered to assist the carers with costs. It may, however, be appropriate to first look at whether the full or partial cost can be met from the CLA.

- **Clubs and activities**

In most cases, the carer should meet the costs of clubs and activities from the Fostering Allowance. Sometimes you and the child's social worker will agree that a young person requires a wider range of activities and in such a case the Council may consider discretionary payments to assist with the costs of additional clubs and extra activities. It will, however, be appropriate to first look at whether the full or partial cost can be met from the CLA.

- **Special tuition or learning opportunities**

To ensure that we encourage young people in care to reach their full potential we should be encouraging the use of special tuition where this is seen as appropriate in helping a young person to catch up or maintain

progress in education, music or art. It is important that carers discuss these activities with the child's social worker before agreeing to the child participating in extra tuition as it may be possible to identify a volunteer from within the council.

### **Glasses/Contact Lenses**

Many young people are sensitive about their appearance and substantial additional costs may be incurred to purchase reasonable frames. Discretionary payments may be considered to meet the costs.

Contact lenses are sometimes advised by an optician. If contact lenses are recommended then the recurring cost of these should be discussed with the young person's social worker before a decision is made.

### **9.6 The Fostering Fee**

The Fee is the remuneration (income element) paid to carers in recognition of the time and skills involved in caring for a child. The fee for mainstream foster carers relates to the age of the child placed and a fee is paid for each child in placement. (Level 1 - 3 carers approved under the previous scheme, and have elected not to join the age related scheme, should refer to previous guidance).

At each foster carer review, the Fostering Panel must consider whether the number and ages of children for whom foster carers are approved is still appropriate.

Sometimes prospective adopters are also approved as foster carers, solely to enable them to look after a child placed with a view to adoption. Such pre-adoption foster carers are not paid a fee but may be eligible for an element of fostering allowance.

### **Enhanced Fee Payments (applies only to age related fee payments)**

#### **General Principles**

#### **1. Children aged 0 – 11**

There may be times when it is appropriate to pay an enhanced fee to a foster carer looking after a child aged 0-11. This should be seen as exceptional and will be determined following assessment and agreement by a senior manager. Enhanced payments are subject to review.

In all cases, the carers must be considered to have the appropriate skills required for the identified additional care tasks.

## **2. Young people aged 12 +**

The higher rate of fee takes account of the different challenges of looking after a teenager and it is therefore highly unlikely that any further enhancement will apply. Exceptions to this general rule will be considered on a case by case basis and are subject to assessment and agreement at senior management level. Enhanced payments are subject to review.

In all cases, the carers must be considered to have the appropriate skills required for the additional identified care tasks.

## **3. Circumstances where an enhanced payment may be considered**

The following examples should be seen as a guide and not a determinative list:

- The child's needs and behaviours are significantly more complex than would be anticipated in a looked after child or young person of a similar age.
- The young person's care plan tasks affect family life significantly more than would be expected in a fostering family (such as carer required to spend long periods of time supporting the child in school or providing an exceptionally high level of support with extracurricular activities).
- Risks associated with sexualised behaviour, self-harming or complex medical needs that will require a higher level of supervision and monitoring than is usually expected in a fostering placement.
- The child or young person has exceptional personal care needs, which fall to the foster carer, that are considerably out-with those expected of the child's age and stage.
- The child or young person is at high risk of going missing, requiring a high level of monitoring or out of hours team/police involvement.
- A fostering placement is provided by a foster carer (with the relevant skills) as a clear alternative to a residential care placement, including a child returning to the community from a residential placement.

### **9.7 Carers and paid 'time out'**

Mainstream, full time foster carers are entitled to three weeks (21 days) paid "time out" or leave when they continue to receive a fee but are not required to care for a child. All time out is deducted from this leave allowance. Short breaks, single days and full weeks all count as 'time out'. You must keep a record of all time out periods and the supervising worker will review this regularly.



Carers who do not take their full 'paid time out' entitlement may claim payment instead (full or pro rata). The leave year runs from April to March and payment for leave not taken will be made after the end of the leave year.

Specialist Foster carers with Level 3 approval may request up to 6 weeks' time out per year but will not be reimbursed for time that was not, or could not, be taken.

### **9.8 Short breaks and pro-rata payments**

Full time carers who provide a home-base to children on a part-time basis may be entitled to a full fee if this has been agreed in the Child's Plan. Such children are usually at residential school, spend weekend and holiday periods with the carer and have little or no contact with their own families. The allowance will usually be paid on a pro-rata basis.

Carers providing short breaks receive fees and allowances only when the child is in placement.

Full time foster carers are sometimes asked to provide formal support to a child living with another carer. This may be to support the carer during a period of crisis, either as a "one off "or regularly as part of the Child's Plan. In this case the carer providing the short break is paid a pro-rata allowance appropriate to the child's age and a pro-rata fee.

Foster carers who have a vacancy and provide only day time care are paid a daily (or half daily) fostering fee and allowance.

Foster carers who have no vacancy (are fostering their full complement of children) and provide only a few hours care will normally be paid on an hourly basis at the equivalent Day Care rates.

### **9.9 Nominated Carer Payments**

Nominated carers are approved for a specific role and are paid a pro-rata allowance and fee, according to the child's age, for the period the child is with them. Nominated carers do not receive the clothing or pocket money element and the main carer should pass on the relevant amount of personal allowance the young person will need for the period of the break.

### **9.10 Retainers**

A retainer of up to 12 weeks fee is payable to mainstream, full time foster carers when the carer has a vacancy but is not matched with a child. The retainer is paid on the understanding that the carer is available for work.

The level of retainer is determined by the fee paid for the most recently placed young person at the point that placement ended, i.e. aged 0-11 or

aged 12 plus. (Carers approved under the previous fee payment scheme should refer to guidance covering that scheme).

If a carer is subsequently not available or declines a placement (appropriate to their approval) then the retainer may cease. If a carer wishes 'time out' after a placement ends, i.e. is not available, they must take either unpaid leave or paid leave from their holiday entitlement.

Respite/Support/Nominated carers are not paid retainers.

Occasionally, in the interests of a child, we will ask carers to go over numbers. The appropriate fee is payable for such placements, although carers are not paid a retainer when the child leaves.

Carers being paid a retainer may be asked to provide a short term piece of work, such as weekend or overnight respite.

### **9.11 Outreach**

- Outreach payments do not apply for care provided in the carer's own home.
- Outreach is entirely optional on the carer's part.
- Only in exceptional circumstances will an outreach period exceed 3- 4 hours per day.
- Carers are not expected to undertake tasks which fall out-with the usual range of fostering tasks as set out in the Looked After Regulations and National Standards.

Carers providing outreach should be approved for this work at their initial registration Panel or at a subsequent Panel review. A carer's capacity to carry out outreach work should be carefully assessed, including an assessment of the impact such work may have for any child in placement with the carer.

Outreach work may bring carers into contact with children and their families at the child's home. A risk assessment must always be completed before commencing the work and kept under review.

#### **• Outreach Payments**

Payment for Outreach is an hourly fee for the work and is not paid 'per child'. Payment is triggered by the submission of a claim form by the carer, authorised by the supervising social worker/team leader and processed in the same way as other payments to foster carers. Your supervising social worker will provide the relevant form. These should be submitted monthly or on completion of the work.

- **Outreach Expenses**

Expenses incurred in carrying out the work e.g. entry fees or the cost of a snack can also be paid. Expenses should be approved in advance by the supervising social worker. Your social worker can provide a claim form.

### **9.12 Travel Expenses**

Carers can claim some travel expenses when using public transport or mileage when using their own vehicle. The fostering allowance is intended to cover journeys that are part of family life such as outings, shopping trips, visits to the GP or hairdresser and similar outings. The additional Holiday Allowance covers the additional costs incurred during school breaks. Carers cannot therefore claim for these types of journeys.

Mileage or fares can be claimed when the journey is required for a child's additional needs such as family contact or regular hospital visits or taking the child to school if the child attends a school out-with the carer's school catchment area. Some children will benefit from having a school bus pass, however, or a taxi may be arranged if appropriate.

Carers can claim mileage to attend meetings as part of their fostering duties e.g. to attend a Panel or review, training or support group. Please check with your supervising social worker about the current carer mileage rate.

Claims must be submitted on a **monthly** basis.

### **9.13 Holiday Expenses**

Carers may request additional finance to help with the costs of taking the child with them on holiday as, in many cases, the Holiday Allowance will not fully cover the costs involved. The use of the Holiday Allowance will however be taken into account before any additional payment is provided. After taking account of any unused Holiday Allowance, the carer's contribution to the total cost of the holiday is calculated in the following way:

#### **For all holidays**

For each week of the proposed holiday, one tenth of the holiday allowance should be contributed by the carer, and in addition:

- Where the child is going on holiday on his/her own and the carer will not be meeting the usual daily cost of care, **or**
- Where the family and child are going on an inclusive holiday where meals are provided and the carer will not be meeting the usual daily costs of care, for each week of the proposed holiday, half of the general maintenance element of the fostering allowance should be contributed by the carer.

- Where the family and child are going on a self-catering holiday, no contribution to the holiday costs from the fostering allowance will be expected, only the proportion of their holiday allowance as set out above.

### **Examples**

#### **Child going on holiday on his/her own for two weeks**

Carers will contribute towards holiday costs:

2 x 1/10 of holiday allowance

2 x ½ of weekly fostering allowance, exclusive of clothing and pocket money.

#### **Child and family on holiday at hotel (all meals provided) for one week**

Carers will contribute towards holiday costs:

1 x 1/10 of holiday allowance

1 x ½ of weekly fostering allowance, exclusive of clothing and pocket money.

#### **Carers and child on self-catering holiday for three weeks**

Carers will contribute towards holiday costs:

3 x 1/10 of holiday payment

If carers decide to take the child away for more than one family holiday in the year, we would not expect to offer additional finance other than towards costs of the first holiday. Any variation to this principle, such a request for multiple **lower cost** trips must be pre-authorized by the Service Manager.

### **Holiday mileage**

Where carers make their own travel arrangements for holidays or outings, reimbursement for mileage costs must be pre-authorized by the Fostering Team Leader or Service Manager. Normally, for a family holiday that includes the fostered child, a percentage of the mileage costs is appropriate.

### **9.14 Costs of school trips and camps**

Costs of up to £90 in any one year should be met in full by the carers. If the camp costs in excess of £90, then we should calculate it in relation to the carer contributing 50 per cent of the maintenance element of the fostering allowance for the period of absence. Children's Services should pay carers costs over and above these sums.

### **9.15 Fares to school**

Whenever possible we should aim to achieve continuity in schooling for a young person who is looked after and accommodated. This may necessitate considerable travelling and thus extra costs. Carers should not be required to carry the full costs of extensive travel and the social worker will first approach Education for assistance with bus passes. If a bus pass is not available or

suitable, then discretionary payments should be considered (through a mileage claim by the carers).

Where the child attends a school in the carer's local area, and walking is not an option, the carer should normally pay bus fares or travel costs of driving from the child's allowance.

### **9.16 Fares to visit parents and other important social contact**

Everyday fares and travel costs to maintain a child's (local) contact with family and friends are normally paid from the fostering allowance.

Children placed at a distance from their family home, however, may incur higher travel costs and this should not be borne in full by the foster carer. Travel costs incurred during the initial or end stages of a placement can also be high, particularly when high levels of contact between the child and his or her family is an essential component of the plan.

There should therefore be discussion at the placement agreement meeting and prior to LAC reviews about individual circumstances and how additional or long distance travel costs will be managed e.g. what will be paid from the allowance, what may be claimed by the carer as mileage and when a taxi, bus pass or other form of transport is appropriate. The parent's capacity to travel for contact should also be considered.

The question of how much older children should contribute from lifestyle money to pay for travel costs to visit friends is complex, and individual circumstances will need to be looked at. The carer should not be expected to bear the full travel costs for a child who wishes frequent contact with friends, particularly if they live or want to meet up at a distance. Older children, particularly those in settled placements and who can self-travel, may benefit from being provided with a bus pass or cash saver type vouchers. This should be considered at the initial placement meeting and at subsequent reviews.

### **9.17 Placement endings and finance**

A placement ends when the child physically leaves the carer's home and there is no intention that the child will return to live with that carer.

There are certain circumstances in which the date that the child leaves the placement and the agreed date of the placement ending may be different, for example, planned rehabilitation or absconding.

Full fees and full fostering allowances are continued until a clear pattern of visits home is established. Fostering allowances would then be reduced to a pro-rata basis, but the fee would continue until the child leaves the carer's home permanently and the placement ends. This is to reflect the ongoing active work that the carers will be doing during this rehabilitative period.

### **Finance -Unplanned endings**

If a child absconds and does not return to a placement, then the placement will end either on that date or on an alternative date agreed at a LAC review or the child's worker and supervising social worker in consultation with the carer and relevant managers. This will vary according to the child's circumstances.

If the placement ending is to be different from the actual date that the child leaves the home of the carers, a Looked-after Review will decide the actual ending date. In certain circumstances the placement may be kept open for a limited period, usually no longer than two weeks. Such extensions must be agreed as necessary at a Looked-after Review (or, if the child has already left the home, by a special meeting) and by the Fostering Team Leader confirming the carer availability for this.

Administrative staff in the child's Practice Group must be notified so that payment can be adjusted appropriately. Any extensions to the two-week period would require authorisation by a Senior Manager Long-term Care and Support.

### **9.18 Foster care equipment**

East Lothian Council can provide certain equipment to foster carers. Larger items of furniture, beds and other 'non-personal' items, such as, stairgates, fireguards or cots are on loan and returned either at the end of a placement or when you cease fostering. You should discuss your need for equipment with your supervising social worker, initially. The following are *examples* of what can be provided. Please discuss with your social worker if there are items not listed that you feel are needed.

- Baby alarm
- Baby bath
- Buggy & Hood
- Car seat
- Cooker guard
- Cot and mattress
- Cot bumper
- Duvet
- Duvet cover
- Fireguard
- High chair
- Pillows
- Pillowcases
- Playpen
- Pram
- Pram quilt and pillowcase
- Sheets
- Single bed, mattress & headboard (or bunk beds)
- Stair-gate
- Sterilising unit
- Teats and bottles
- Towels
- Training seat/step
- Wardrobe/Storage Unit

NB. Carers should request a **Home Fire Safety Visit** form the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service. An expert will visit to provide fire safety advice and fit smoke detectors for free if you need them.

### **9.19 Foster care & insurance cover**

All foster carers must have appropriate and current building and house contents insurance cover. The Council does not carry insurance cover for your building and house contents.

You are advised to inform your own insurers of your undertaking as a foster carer. If you incur any loss or damage caused by your foster child then you should claim through your own insurance cover. The level of excess set is a decision for you and your insurer to agree.

Loss or malicious damage caused by a foster child may not be covered by your current insurer so you must check this. There are however insurance companies which cater for foster carers and which advertise in the Fostering Network magazine.

The Council has insurance cover providing indemnity. This covers foster carers in respect of all sums which the Council or foster carers may become legally liable to pay as compensation arising out of claims made by third parties in respect of:

- Bodily injury to third parties arising out the Council's activities;
- Damage to property of third parties arising out of the Council's activities.

If an accident to the child occurs, or a third party sustains bodily injury or property damage, you should inform your social worker immediately. If at a later stage you receive a letter from the child's parents or lawyer, or indeed any member of the general public, complaining about damage done and/or claiming compensation then you should forward all correspondence immediately to your supervising social worker. Do not enter into correspondence with the claimant or claimant's lawyer.

Retrospective insurance cover for carers in the event of their being sued for damages or faced with legal liabilities at the time when they were acting in the capacity as foster carers for the Council, or its previous constituent authorities, is in place.

### **Car Insurance**

As a foster carer, it is your responsibility to ensure that your car insurance covers any additional liability relating to your role as a carer. Any vehicle used for transporting children must be maintained in a legal and roadworthy condition and used in compliance with statutory regulations. You must also ensure that your car insurance has a business clause that allows you to transport children fostered by you.

## **Holiday or Travel Insurance**

You must have suitable holiday insurance for yourself and any fostered child travelling with you. Check if the child is covered by your own insurance or you may need to obtain this through another company.

East Lothian's foster carers are provided with an individual membership of the Fostering Network. This entitles members to legal advice and representation if required. (If there are any difficulties with insurance, the Fostering Network may be able to provide advice).

Terms and conditions are available from the Fostering Network on 0141 204 1400

## **9.20 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) -Guidelines for Foster Carers**

DLA is a payment paid to carers of children who have greater care or mobility needs than others of the same age who are in normal physical and mental health. Full details of DLA Rules can be downloaded from DWP website. DLA can be applied for on behalf of children (aged three months for care component and three years for mobility). DLA is not means tested or taxed. It is to be used to enhance the life of children with a disability. Any adult who is caring for a child with additional needs, providing the child is not in hospital or residential care for more than 28 days (this is cumulative and does not have to be 28 consecutive days), can apply for DLA Care. The Mobility Part of DLA is not affected by hospital or residential admissions.

- **DLA for children in Foster Care**

When a child is accommodated the child's social worker should explore if DLA has been applied for and if not foster carers should apply on behalf of a child in their full-time care. Between 40 – 60% of people who are entitled to DLA are not receiving it. The child's birth family should be informed by the child's social worker that an application is being made. If the child already receives DLA then this will be transferred to the foster carers. It is the child's money and needs to be kept in a separate account, which moves with the child. The foster carer will ideally be the appointee, but the Local Authority can become the appointee if necessary.

The team around the child have a duty to ensure all aspects of the child's welfare are being met within the planning meetings. Therefore, DLA and financial issues are a part of this. If there are any disagreements then the Children's Rights' Officer can become involved. They can also be asked to gain the child's opinion. DLA can be discussed every three months at joint meetings between child (if possible), carer, child's social worker and **any other relevant person**. Carers are not expected to produce receipts for small items of expenditure, but must record what it has been used for and how it is beneficial to the child. Any expenditure over £50 will require a receipt.



Although the above is good practice, neither the fostering agency nor the child's social worker has the authority to decide how the appointee spends the money. The appointee has been entrusted with this and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is clear that decisions on how DLA is spent are their responsibility. If, however, a third party feels that the money is being misused then it is expected that they will report this to the DWP who will then investigate. The DWP is responsible for monitoring the use of DLA for all claimants and you can contact them on 0845 712 3456 to discuss any queries.

### **Examples of how DLA money can be spent**

- Activities that are costly e.g. horse riding, after school clubs and play schemes – that are seen as therapeutic, not child care;
- To enable a child to participate in activities such as going to the cinema where they will need the support of another, DLA could fund the person accompanying (above what a non-disabled child of the same age may require);
- As the contract for a Motability car is three years, usually Mobility DLA should only be used to get a car for a fostered child's use if a specially adapted car is required and the child is in a very secure placement;
- Additional holiday cost due to child's disability;
- Individual equipment such as a computer, communication aids, broadband;
- Special toys to meet the child's needs – which may be of therapeutic value;
- OT recommended equipment that is non-essential, but desirable;
- Specially adapted mobile phone;
- Practical and emotional needs of the child e.g. taxis;
- Complimentary/therapeutic services i.e. aromatherapy/music or art therapy;
- Anything that improves a child's life

### **In exceptional circumstances**

- Damage to property;
- Additional help with personal care;
- Replacement clothing where there is excessive wear and tear;
- Domestic help to allow carer to spend more time with the child during school holidays.

In conclusion DLA should be used so that inclusion can become a reality. Children with a Learning or Physical Disability must be supported to participate in their local community. DLA allows individuals to pay for the support they need in order to access social and leisure activities allowing them to enjoy what society has to offer and live an active, social and fulfilling life.

## **Personal Independence Payment (PIP): Guidelines for Foster Carers**

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is ending for people aged 16 to 64.

DLA will continue if a young person is under 16 . They will continue getting DLA until the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) invites them to apply for PIP. Nothing needs to be done until DWP writes to you about the DLA unless the young person's circumstances change.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a benefit that provides a cash contribution towards the extra costs associated with a long-term health condition or disability. It provides support for those disabled people with the greatest needs to overcome barriers and live independent lives.

Like the benefit it replaces, it is non-means tested, non-taxable and is paid to people who are in or out of work.

### **Eligibility**

People must be aged 16 to 64 and have a health condition or disability where

- They have had difficulties with daily living or getting around (or both) for 3 months;
- They expect these difficulties to continue for at least 9 months (unless terminally ill with less than 6 months to live).

### **Examples of daily living difficulties**

The daily living part of PIP may be awarded if help is needed more than half of the time with things like:

- preparing or eating food;
- washing, bathing and using the toilet;
- dressing and undressing;
- reading and communicating;
- managing your medicines or treatments;
- making decisions about money;
- engaging with other people.

The mobility part of PIP may be awarded if a person needs help going out or moving around.

### **Guardianship Order**

This is an order under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 from the Sheriff Court stating who the Sheriff has appointed to look after the affairs of someone who is not able to look after those affairs for himself or herself. It also says what the appointed person or persons can actually do. The child's social worker will apply for Guardianship in preparation for the young person transitioning to Adult Services (if necessary).

See the Scottish Government publication - Guardianship and Intervention Orders – Making an application, A Guide for Carers.  
<https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2010/06/28144224/0>

### **9.21 Contributions and young people over school leaving age**

Once young people have left school and have an income in their own right, they are expected to contribute to the cost of their keep, just as young people living with his/her own family might be expected to do. This should be discussed at reviews well in advance of the young person's school leaving date so it doesn't come as a shock to the young person. There is a scale of contributions depending on the young person's income. The contribution payable by the young person is deducted from the fostering allowance payable to the carer.

### **Educational Maintenance Awards**

Educational Maintenance Awards of (currently) up to £30 a week with the possibility of additional bonus payments of up to £150 can be made to young people aged 16 or over who continue in full time education, either in School or at a College of Further Education, if they fall within the required income bracket. All of our looked-after young people are likely to be eligible for these. Carers need to support young people in their care to access these. Guidance personnel in school will supply information about how best to do this.

There should be discussion and agreement between the carer, young person and social worker at a review *before* the young person reaches 16 about how EMA payments will relate to clothing, travel and personal allowance payments already being paid to the child. Subsequent reviews should check the arrangement is still appropriate.

# **Section 10**

## **Arrangements for a child's care away from their foster carer**

## **Section 10 - Arrangements for a child's care away from their foster carer**

Situations arise when you may need to involve another person in the care of your fostered child. You may need someone to look after a young person while you attend an appointment or go to a meeting. You could have an emergency or, the other end of the scale, you may need planned time out (leave) for a holiday, a break or time to attend a family event. Sometimes a daytime arrangement will suffice but on other occasions, overnight care is required.

### **10.1 Day time Care**

#### **Occasional babysitting/ day time arrangements within the carer's home**

Occasional daytime / babysitting arrangements are the responsibility of the foster carer and do not usually count as part of the carers 'paid time out'. You should use your good judgement in selecting a suitable babysitter. The carer is responsible for any financial arrangements, using the child's allowance.

If this sort of care is needed on a regular basis, the supervising social worker must be satisfied that you have thought carefully about the chosen 'babysitter's' strengths and considered any additional support needed by the babysitter or the child. Your supervising social worker will make basic checks and should keep up to date with the babysitter's circumstances through regular discussion with you and the identified babysitter if felt necessary.

#### **Occasional and emergency daytime care in another person's home**

There will be times when a crisis arises and the regular babysitter either is not available or cannot come to your home. At these times, you should use your judgement about leaving the child at the babysitter's home or with another suitable person.

You must inform the child's worker / supervising social worker as soon as possible after the event. You should use the fostering allowance to meet any costs.

If the person is likely to have recurring care of the child, the supervising social worker will complete checks as required, such as a police check, Health & Safety check and if relevant, a pet assessment. The degree of scrutiny should be proportionate to the circumstances, such as the child's age and the likely frequency of care, mindful of Scottish Government guidance that foster carers can make decisions about children staying with another person based on their good judgement. Your supervising social worker will meet with the person in order to be satisfied that he or she understands the basic principles of looking after someone else's child, such as safer care, acceptable behaviour management and knows how to access additional support. The

supervising social worker will monitor these types of care arrangement with you.

### **Regular daytime support in the carer's home**

This should be a rare occurrence; the supervising social worker and the child's social worker must carefully consider why regular day time support is needed and be satisfied that any arrangements are appropriate for the child. It may be that you need a member of your family, or a friend, to look after a fostered child regularly, while you take another child to a club or regular activity or while you supervise contact. Another example might be if you are ill or temporarily incapacitated but are happy for the child to remain in placement if you have daytime support.

In this sort of circumstance, the supervising social worker should meet with the proposed alternative carer and complete appropriate checks. The social worker should also be satisfied that the proposed person understands the basic principles of fostering, such as safer care, behaviour management and knows how to access additional support.

Foster carers are generally responsible for any financial reimbursement (from the allowance) to their family member or friend unless, and unusually, this has been agreed in advance by a senior manager.

### **Regular daytime support in another person's home**

If the child's plan includes a need for additional daytime support, beyond what the foster carer can provide, then an approved childminder or day carer is the usually the appropriate resource.

## **10.2 Arranging alternative overnight care for the child**

### **With another foster carer**

Your supervising social worker can support you to take time out through providing alternative care arrangements with another foster carer. This isn't always straightforward however. Foster carers generally have limited capacity due to their own fostering commitments and their availability is liable to change at short notice. It is not unusual that a planned respite arrangement is cancelled at the last minute because the identified respite carer is no longer free. This is very unsettling for young people and is a source of frustration for foster carers trying to make plans in advance. Sometimes, however, carers looking after part of a sibling group have reciprocal arrangements with each other that provides continuity of care and a chance for brothers and sisters to have direct contact during the holiday period.

**A minimum of two months' notice** is required if you are planning time away from fostering and require the fostering team to make the arrangements for cover. This is so that there is time to make suitable alternative arrangements,

prepare the child, notify the child's family and make any plans needed for contact.

'Carer to carer' arrangements must always be arranged and agreed through the supervising social worker for both carers; a carer making a 'private' arrangement with another carer could potentially disrupt plans for another child.

The supervising social workers will ensure appropriate allowances are paid/deducted when a child moves between foster carers. The main carer, however, is responsible for passing on pocket money for the period and the appropriate element of the holiday allowance.

### **Informal / occasional arrangements for overnight care periods made within the carer's circle of friends and family**

It is generally better for young people to stay with someone they know and trust than move to foster carers who are strangers to them. If, following discussions involving the young person, his or her parents, the carers and the young person's social worker, it is believed that the young person may stay with someone who is not an approved foster carer, but who knows the child well, then the foster carer's supervising social worker must make basic enquiries before this is formally agreed. The following process will be followed:

The supervising social worker and /or the child's social worker will meet with the friend / family member to:

- establish a connection, confirm the arrangement is suitable;
- ensure that the person knows how to get additional support and has sufficient information about the young person;
- be satisfied that the person understands the basic principles of looking after another person's child and is aware of minimum fostering standards, such as safer care and behaviour management;
- put in place measures to provide support and monitoring if the period is beyond a day or two.

The social worker will also request an Enhanced Disclosure check or other police check. A Health & Safety check and if relevant a Pet Assessment may also be appropriate.

The foster carer should ensure that the substitute carer has the child's allowance for the relevant days and that the child has sufficient pocket money for the agreed period.

## **Nominated Carers**

Carers are encouraged to identify someone from within their own support network, family or circle of friends who is willing to act as their "Nominated Carer". You cannot 'Nominate' a person who is already an approved foster carer and of course must first establish that the person is happy to be 'nominated'.

Nominated Carers, unlike regular babysitters, are assessed and approved as foster carers, but the assessment is proportionate in recognition that nominated carers are only available for a specific task and limited period.

Nominated Carers receive a pro-rata 'age related' fee and pro-rata basic allowance when the child or children are in their care.

Nominated Carers provide support that enables the main carer to plan for time-out, confident that arrangements are in place and the child will be with someone he or she knows.

If the Nominated Carer is looking after a child as part of the child's plan then the frequency should be clearly established at the outset and kept under review. If the Nominated Carer is looking after the child to give the main carer a break/holiday/time out, the number of days care must not exceed the number of days leave to which the carer is entitled i.e. 21 or 42 days.

With the agreement of the child's worker, the main carer and Nominated Carer can plan periods of respite for a time that is mutually suitable. You must however notify your supervising social worker so that appropriate monitoring and payments are in place.

### **10.3 Home alone overnight**

A foster child under the age of 16 years must never be left alone overnight. This does not mean that anyone over that age can be left alone overnight. Their competence, reliability, behaviour, the existing level of trust between carers and the young person all need to be determined. This must always be discussed with the young person's and the supervising social worker.

### **10.4 Young people out alone**

Being given the freedom to go out alone without supervision is a critical milestone for children. It is important that children learn basic skills such as 'stranger danger,' road safety, what to do in an emergency and that older children know how to use public transport.

Young people need to cope with the risks that are associated with teenage behaviour, how to cope with peer pressures, how to be assertive and say 'no', be aware of the hazards of drugs and alcohol, missing the last bus and being out at night. Looked after children may seem 'street-wise' but this does not mean that they can look after themselves. Carers need to know



where they are going, who they are with, when they will be back. Arrangements should be made for 'checking in' by phone or text. As with all young people, carers may have to negotiate, create boundaries and if appropriate apply sanctions. Carers should discuss this with their own and the child's social worker.

### **10.5 Sleep-overs**

A Guide for carers about sleep-overs is included in the appendices and should be referred to for fuller advice.

Children and young people in foster care sometimes ask to stay over at a friend's house and this may be included in the placement agreement or care plan. This should be encouraged, wherever appropriate, and is a way of building social skills, learning and having fun. The carer must act as a reasonable parent would to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the young person. The views of the child's parents, where relevant, should be taken into account.

Carers are also encouraged to support children to have a friend for a 'sleep over.'

In either case it is essential that carers and the other child's parents have good communication and there are clear plans for collecting and returning the child.

Where overnight stays become regular it may be necessary for the child's SW to carry out relevant checks. For some it may be appropriate for them to become respite carers.

# **Section 11**

# **Complaints and**

# **Allegations**

## Section 11- Complaints and Allegations

### 11.1 Complaints by Foster Carers

If carers are dissatisfied with any aspect of the support they receive from the Council or Children's Services they should usually raise this with their supervising social worker, or team Leader in the first instance.

The Whistleblowing Practice Guidance contained within the appendices details how foster carers can raise serious concerns they may have about East Lothian Council Children's Services.

The Council also has a formal complaints procedure which is available to carers who wish to formally complain about Council Services. You can get a feedback form from your worker or local council office, which tells you about the complaint procedures. Please note that you should make a complaint within 6 months of the date that you first noticed the problem that you are complaining about.

If you remain unhappy you refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Please write to:

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman  
4 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS  
Tel: 0800 377 7330 or email: [ask@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk)

Tel: 0870 011 5378, Fax: 0870 011 5379, e-mail:  
[enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk)

If you want to make a complaint about a registered service, you can also contact the Care Commission, Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY.

Tel: 01382 207100. Fax: 01382 207289. Lo-call: 0845 6030890

### 11.2 Complaints about Foster Carers

According to the Fostering Network, one in six foster carers will have a complaint or allegation made against them during the course of their fostering career. Caring for someone else children is not easy and fostering places great demands upon carers and their families. Sometimes a complaint may be made against them, for example a child's parents may complain that the child is not getting enough pocket money, or a teacher complain made about the quality of the child's clothing; or a neighbour might complain about the foster carers not managing the child's behaviour or damaging their property.

If a complaint is made, or a concern raised, about the quality of care provided or a person's suitability to be a foster carer, the Council has a responsibility to investigate. Depending on the nature of the complaint, or level of concern, there are a number of ways this might be dealt with. If the complaint involves a child in placement it may be resolved through a joint meeting with the carer, the supervising social worker and the child's social worker, or possibly involve meeting with a Children's Rights Officer through Who Cares? Scotland. The fostering Team Leader may also be involved. Sometimes an independent investigator is appointed, because of the need for the process to be objective.

Complaints made about a carer's suitability due to a matter not connected to a child in placement will be investigated by the Team Leader and supervising social worker in the first instance, who will report to the Group Service Manager to decide whether further action is required and if so what the action should be.

If it is not possible to resolve the matter at this level or if it is a more serious complaint a more formal referral may be made through East Lothian's Complaints Procedures.

We recognise that complaints are stressful for carers. When an investigation is undertaken we try to adhere to clear timescales for dealing with it. This is usually within 28 days. At the end of the investigation we give you feedback wherever possible. Sometimes we have to protect the confidentiality of third parties, so cannot always share all information with you. During the investigation process we try to provide or arrange for support for you and keep you informed about the progress of the investigation. However, when we are investigating serious complaints it is usually more appropriate for carers to seek support from out with the Council, such as through Fostering Network.

Whenever a potentially serious complaint is made about a foster carer, the findings of the investigation are recorded and the Care Inspectorate are informed of the outcome, including when the complaint is assessed as 'unfounded'.

### **11.3 Allegations against Foster Carers**

*"An allegation is an assertion from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has or may have behaved in a way that has harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children.*

*Allegations are more serious than general complaints against foster carers because allegations have to be investigated under the local child protection*

*procedure. Allegations should be treated differently from concerns about poor standards of care.*" TFN Scotland

An allegations about a foster carer would be managed in accordance with the guidance "*Managing allegations against foster carers and approved kinship carers. How agencies should respond*" (published by the Scottish Government, May 2013) and following the Edinburgh and Lothian Interagency Child Protection Procedures.

A child (or his/her parent) may make an allegation against a carer because:

- Something that has happened recently reminds the child or parent of an event that took place before the child was with the carer;
- It is a way of trying to regain control over his/her life;
- The child (or parent) sees making a false allegation as a way of being moved or returned home;
- The child (or parent) has misinterpreted an innocent action, such as putting an arm round the child to offer comfort;
- There has been an incidence of intentional or unintentional abuse by the carer or a member of the carer household/family circle.

The Group Service Manager will decide whether an investigation is required. This is usually done in consultation with the police and the community paediatrician. If an investigation is deemed necessary, the procedure that follows is similar to the one used to investigate any allegation of child abuse and can include part, or all, of the following:

- Interview of the child by police/ social workers;
- Interview of other children in the household;
- Police interview of the alleged perpetrator;
- *If deemed necessary*, the removal of the child;
- Consideration of the safety of any other child in the household;
- Child Protection Case Conference
- Referral to a Children's Hearing;
- Possible prosecution.

At an early stage, efforts will be made to identify a suitable source of support to the carer and his/her family. One source of support is through the Fostering Network. East Lothian's foster carers are provided with individual membership of The Fostering Network who can provide both individual support and legal support as needed. The Fostering Network has produced a booklet designed to help foster carers understand what is likely to happen if an allegation is made against them or a member of their family. It contains:

- An explanation of what allegations are and why they are made;
- Suggestions of good practice to minimise the risk of an allegation;
- Advice about what to do if an allegation is made;
- Advice on how to seek legal support in the event of an allegation;
- Information on what might happen once an allegation has been made;
- Sources of further assistance and independent support

The supervising social worker, team leader and fostering service managers ensure that the foster carer has information about the process and timing although not necessarily the details of the investigation.

Children in placement should not have to move unless this is the only safe solution or they refuse to remain in the placement. This will be balanced against the need to minimise distress.

If it is decided that the child needs to move then this may happen immediately without any period of notice. Written notice of the decision and confirmation of the date that the placement ended will be given as soon as possible. If the child is moved, continued contact between the carer and the child will depend on the circumstances.

After completion of an investigation, unless an allegation has been judged completely unfounded, the Fostering Panel will review the circumstances and make a recommendation. The absence of a criminal conviction does not necessarily mean that abuse has not occurred. In some instances, even after full investigation, a serious allegation remains unsolved or the Procurator Fiscal may decide that it is not in the public interest to pursue a conviction. The Fostering Panel Review will have to consider all the circumstances and recommend whether the carer/carers should continue to look after children on behalf of the Council. Their recommendation will be made to the Agency Decision Maker. Carers have the right to ask for a review of the ADM decision if they do not agree with it.

If the child is subject to a supervision order with a measure of residence with the carers, the Children's Hearing must be informed of the allegation, no matter the outcome. The Care Inspectorate must also be informed.

The child will be told the outcome of the investigation in a manner suited to their age and understanding. Written information about the outcome will be sent to the child's parents or guardians, the person against whom the allegation was made and the Head of Children's Services.

Detailed records are kept of all allegations, investigations, findings and outcomes. Information relevant to the carer will remain on the carer's records. Information relevant to the child will be held in the child's records. Any necessary reference to the carer will be held in the restricted section of the child's file.

Further information about child protection may be accessed at-

**[www.emppc.org](http://www.emppc.org)**

Please also refer to Section 5.9 for advice about what foster carers can do to avoid accusations being made.

# **Section 12**

# **Partner Agencies**



## Section 12 - Partner Agencies

### 12.1 The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network works throughout the UK to promote and improve the service provided for children in foster care. Membership is open to all those concerned about children and young people and includes foster carers, local foster care groups, local authorities and voluntary organisations. East Lothian is a 'Corporate' member of The Fostering Network, and as such receives information about courses, publications and developments in foster care. In addition each approved foster carer is now provided with individual membership of The Fostering Network which provides both professional support and full legal advice and representation as needed.

#### **The Fostering Network**

**Ingram House**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**

**227 Ingram Street**

**Glasgow**

**G1 1DA**

**Tel: 0141 204 1400**

### 12.2 Who Cares? (Scotland)

Who Cares? (Scotland) is a national, independent organisation that works with, and advocates on behalf of, looked after and care experienced young people up to the age of 26, providing advice and support. East Lothian Council funds a Who Cares? Scotland Worker who is available to young people in Foster Care or Residential Care in East Lothian. The worker can be contacted at **Who Cares? Scotland, c/o Randall House, Macmerry, East Lothian. Mobile number: 07985046739**. Alternatively, you can phone Who Cares? Scotland on 0141 226 4441.

Who Cares? Scotland produces a magazine, which we mail to all foster carers who are looking after children and young people over the age of 10. Please ensure young people are given their copy of this.

### 12.3 Children 1<sup>st</sup>

Children 1<sup>st</sup> is a national agency with a local service that is based at Randall House Macmerry. Children 1<sup>st</sup> help us ensure that standards of care and services are as good as they can be through:

- Early intervention and preventative work with young families whose children are on the cusp of care;
- Helping us engage with families through Family Group Conferencing.

## **12.4 Children and Young People's Commissioner**

The office of commissioner was established by Scottish Government. The Commissioner's role is to promote and safeguard the rights of young people up to aged 18 years.

More information is available from:

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young people, Roseberry House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

Telephone 0800 0191179 or visit [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)

## Section 13 - Appendices

- [BAAF Guidance – Placing Children with Dog-Owning Families](#)
- [Care and Control of Children in Foster Care July 2018](#)
- [Management of Medication Guidance for Children's Services](#)
- [Out of Hours Service Leaflet](#)
- [Reporting & Recording Incidents of restraint](#)
- [The Carers Guide to Homework](#)
- [Week 3 Boswell & Cudmore paper – Understanding the blind spot](#)