

SAFER CARING POLICY

1.0 Regulatory and National Minimum Standards Framework

- 1.1 **Regulation 4** of the **Fostering Services Regulations 2002** requires Stoke-on-Trent City Council Fostering Service to prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with foster carers from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect against foster carers.
- 1.2 **Standard 4** of the **National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011)** requires safer caring guidelines to be provided, based on a written policy, for each foster home, in consultation with the foster carer(s) and everyone else in the household. These guidelines should be agreed prior to approval and explained clearly and appropriately to any child/young person placed.
- 1.3 For individual children/young people placed it may be necessary to agree and implement additional safer caring guidelines based on their identified needs – these should be agreed between foster carer(s), the social worker for child/young person, the supervising social worker for the foster carer(s) and, where possible, the child/young person him/herself.
- 1.4 In addition to an agreed safer caring policy for every foster family, the assessment of a foster family must include the completion of a health and safety questionnaire to establish whether there are actual or potential hazards to the safety of a foster child/young person, what action will be taken to remedy these and within what timescales.

2.0 Aims and objectives of this policy

- 2.1 The aims of this policy are to ensure that all foster homes have agreed and understood strategies in place to keep:
 - Children/young people in placement safe from abuse from adults
 - Children/young people in the foster home safe from abuse by other children/young people in the household.
 - Children/young people safe from abuse by access to inappropriate material in print, on television or video or DVD or via the Internet **Ref: Children's Access to Computer's and Internet Safety Guidance**
 - Members of the foster family safe from allegations of abuse.

3.0 Application of this policy

- 3.1 A comprehensive Safer Caring Policy which is reviewed at the commencement of a new placement and subsequently at regular intervals will reduce the risk of allegations.

However where a complaint or allegations of abuse or neglect are made against foster carers these will be dealt with in accordance with the procedure for **Managing Allegations, Serious Cause for Concern and Complaints against Foster Carers**.

- 3.2 Safer caring guidelines must be provided and kept up to date for each foster home.
- 3.3 Assessing social workers must ensure that a family policy for safer caring practice is produced, based on this policy, during the assessment process. Social workers should ensure that all members of the household are involved in this process and that there is consensus on the content of the family policy for safer caring.

Practice Guidance
Standard 4 – Safeguarding Children
Underpinning legislation:

11 Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare
12 Arrangements for the protection of children

Outcome:

Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse and accident.

- 3.4 The original family safer caring policy will be retained by foster carer(s) for reference. A copy of each foster family's safer caring policy will be retained on their file by their supervising social worker.
- 3.5 The family's safer caring policy should be discussed with the child's or young person's social worker prior to or at the point of placement, and at the placement agreement meeting. Consideration will need to be given at this stage to the particular needs of the foster child/young person and the implication of this for safe caring. In some cases it may be apparent that the proposed placement is not suitable and an alternative placement should be identified. Or it may be identified that additional guidelines are required because of the background and/or specific needs of the child/young person to be placed. In this circumstance an individual risk assessment should be drawn up for the child/young person in placement to take into account the child/young person's individual needs. This will be in addition to the Family Safer Caring Policy.
- 3.6 Safe caring actions should be included in the foster placement agreement that should exist for every placement.
- 3.7 The foster family's safer caring policy should be shared with the child/young person, in an age appropriate and sensitive way, as early as possible in the placement. It is important not to communicate the safer caring policy as a list of 'dos and don'ts' or 'rules' but as a way of living together that will make everybody feel more comfortable.

4.0 Review of safer caring policies

- 4.1 Safer caring policies will need to be revised as the circumstances of the fostering household change. This should be done immediately if there are significant changes such as someone joining the household or if the foster family moves house. In such

cases the revised policy may need to be agreed with the social worker for any child/young person in placement.

4.2 The existence of a safer caring policy, and the need to update this, should be covered at every foster carer review.

5.0 The need for a safer caring policy

5.1 All families have arrangements (perhaps described as 'family rules') for day-to-day living. These will vary from family to family and will be more or less formal depending on the circumstances and preferences of each family. In most families such arrangements are unwritten and unspoken. Children within the family learn how these operate as part of their day-to-day development and generally accept this as the 'norm' as they have limited experience of anything else.

5.2 Foster carers need to be aware of the arrangement in operation in their household for three reasons:

- They need to consider the impact of the way the family functions on a foster child/young person joining the household. Adjustments are likely to be needed and foster carers need to think about ways of minimising the disruption to family routines.
- Foster carers need to consider the implications of their existing 'family rules' for children/young people joining the household. These children/young people will already have other experiences of family life and these may be very different to what is allowed and what is not allowed in the foster home. Some children/young people may come from chaotic households where there are few boundaries and adjusting to what appears to be a more formal structure could be difficult. Alternatively some may have known a very rigid and structured background where they have had little control over their own lives, and adjusting to new found freedoms may be challenging and problematic.
- Foster carers will need to identify behaviour or practices within their own household that might be acceptable to them, but will increase risk when fostering a child. Some perfectly acceptable routines in families could potentially put both children/young people and foster carers at risk. For example, a familiar experience for the foster carer(s) might be their own children getting into bed with them, or their getting into the child's bed, as part of a bedtime or early morning routine – however this would not be advisable with foster children.

6.0 Developing a safer caring policy

6.1 All members of the household should be involved in agreeing the safer caring policy, including children of the household.

6.2 While foster care has changed dramatically over recent years, there may still be a tendency with heterosexual couples for one partner to be seen as the 'primary' carer and one as the 'secondary' carer, with the latter usually being the male partner. Sometimes, because of other commitments and time constraints, the secondary carer may not attend training or support groups and may not be directly involved in planning meetings or reviews for individual foster children/young people. This means that they

might not be aware of all the issues that need to be considered to ensure safer caring and it is essential therefore that they participate fully in developing the family's safer caring policy.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

While some children/ young people are abused by women or other children/young people, the majority of abusers (especially in cases of sexual abuse) are men and most allegations against foster carers, especially of sexual abuse, are made against male foster carers. Men who foster therefore need to be fully involved in working out how to provide care safely.

6.3 Developing a safer caring policy should not mean changing everything that foster carers normally do. It is about considering which elements of the way the household operates might put foster children/young people or household members at risk. Once these elements are identified, foster carers need to develop strategies that minimise this risk.

6.4 A foster family's safer caring policy should be as brief and clear as possible, and only include those practices that will enhance safer caring. It is important to write these down so that children/young people joining the household, their parents and social workers understand the way the household operates.

7.0 Additions to the household

7.1 Foster carers and supervising social workers should ensure that the household's safer caring guidelines remain current and appropriate by reviewing them on a regular basis. This must always be done where someone joins the household and where a foster carer or other household member begins a relationship with someone who will have access to the household and contact with any children/young people who are fostered.

8.0 Potential Contents of Safer Caring Policies

8.1 Foster carers and assessing/supervising social workers will need to consider a wide range of issues when developing a safer caring policy. The following are some of these and how they may be addressed. However, foster carers and social workers should remember that this list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

8.2 Daily Log

Daily events must be recorded. This should include any contact with birth family, behaviour patterns, including positive as well as negative behaviour, medical and developmental issues and general day to day progress.

8.3 Bedrooms (Children/Young People)

- While ideally foster children/young people should have their own bedrooms, sharing of bedrooms is acceptable. However each child/young person must have their own bed and space for some privacy

National Minimum Standard for Fostering Services, Standard 6.4

- If a child/young person has been abused or has abused another child, then their needs and the needs of all other children must be assessed and the outcome of this assessment recorded before any decision is made to allow the sharing of bedrooms

National Minimum Standard for Fostering Services Standard 6.5

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

In Stoke-on-Trent, unrelated children over 11 years of age should have their own bedroom. Unrelated children under 11 years of age may share a bedroom subject to a risk assessment being completed in respect of the sharing arrangement.

- In no circumstances should an adult get into a child's bed.
- Where children are to share bedrooms, consideration needs to be given to how each child is afforded some privacy, both for their possessions and their need for personal space.
- Prior to a child in care sharing a bedroom with another child, discussions should take place between the foster carer, the supervising social worker, the child's social worker and the children, so that any sensitive issues or risks can be discussed.
- Consideration needs to be given to when others may enter the bedroom. Except in an emergency, others should be expected to ask permission before entering the room and older children should be given increasing control over who goes into their room.
- Where someone does go into a child's/young person's bedroom, whether they are another child or an adult, the door should always be kept open.
- Careful consideration should be given to the use of sending a child to their bedroom as a sanction as for some children this will trigger memories of prior abuse.
- It is preferable for a female carer or both a male and female carer to be involved in putting a child/young person to bed and the bedroom door should be kept open.

8.4 Bedrooms (Foster Carers)

- Many parents allow their own children to come into their bedrooms and even share their bed for a variety of reasons - for play, to read, to chat or to be comforted. While foster children/young people have the same needs, entering their foster carer's bedroom is not to be encouraged and under no circumstances should a child share a bed with foster carers.
- Particularly for children/young people who have been abused, such practices may again trigger memories of prior abuse for any child/young person and the foster carer(s) will risk leaving themselves open to allegations of abuse. Foster carers therefore need to find other ways of providing such times of comfort and affection outside the bedroom. This might be, for example, by reading together on the sofa.
- If having children in the bedroom is the usual practice for the household, foster carers need to discuss and agree with their assessing/supervising social worker how to change their family routines in order to become a safer care fostering household.
- If a child/young person is unwell and in need of comfort and supervision throughout the night, one strategy might be for the child/young person to sleep on the sofa with the foster carer in an armchair nearby.

8.5 In the bathroom

- Children/young people have a right to privacy which should be promoted but may also need supervision because of their age, ability and developmental needs. It is

important to be clear about who is the most appropriate adult in a fostering household to bath, supervise, dry, dress or help dress a child/young person. Account must be taken of any information about a child's/young person's background, especially any previous known or suspected history of abuse and/or of allegations of abuse. This information should directly inform bathing routines and be recorded within the foster placement agreement.

- Children/young people who are able to bath themselves should be encouraged to do so and be given privacy in the bathroom. One strategy for giving a child some privacy and reducing the risk of misunderstanding or allegations might be to keep the bathroom door unlocked and ajar while privacy is maintained.
- A household that cannot provide a female carer for younger children or other children who have needs that mean they require help in bathing, is unlikely to be approved.
- Male foster carers should not be left alone to bath or dress children. There may be occasions when it is appropriate for a male foster carer to assist with bathing – for example with a teenage boy who would find it embarrassing to have a female foster carer helping in this way.

8.6 Dress

- No member of the household should walk around naked or in underwear
- Foster carers should make sure that all members of the household and foster children/young people have a dressing gown as well as appropriate nightwear.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

It is important not make foster children feel uncomfortable e.g. the sight of adults/others naked or in a state of undress may trigger difficult memories, cause anxieties and even result in the child/young person regressing to past behaviours.

8.7 Children/young people playing

- Consideration is needed as to where in the house children may play unsupervised.
- Generally children should be supervised when they are playing together, either at the foster home or someone else's home. Foster carers should ensure that children/ young people are kept within earshot and checked on when they go quiet.
- Children should not normally be allowed to play with other children behind closed doors, although foster carers will need to balance the need for safety against the need for privacy for older children.
- Consideration should be given to children playing without supervision in other 'hidden' settings such as tents and playhouses.
- Where children wish to play outside the house, alone or with others, the child's physical safety will need to be considered as well as the potential risks to the child and that the child may present to others. Invite other children to play in your garden/ house.
- Foster children's greater susceptibility to bullying or being targeted by a potential abuser should also be considered.

- Foster carers should avoid placing themselves in compromising situations when playing with children – for example it may not be appropriate to play games which involve lots of physical contact such as rough and tumble activities and tickling.

8.8 Showing affection

- The need for affection and reassurance is a basic human need that is of particular importance to children's development. However, there is a need to balance this with the risk to foster children/young people and the risk to foster carers of affection being misinterpreted. While a spontaneous hug to one's own children fulfils this basic need and serves to strengthen the bond between adult and child, it may mean something very different to the foster child/young person.
- It is safer to agree that no one in the household touches another person without that person's permission. Children/young people should always be asked first if they want a hug or if it is alright for a foster carer to give them a hug and they need to be taught that it is perfectly acceptable to say no.
- If a child/young person is to receive a hug then the manner in which this is done should be appropriate e.g. sitting child at side of foster carer and not on his/her lap.

8.9 Travelling in the car

- Everyone travelling in the foster family's car must wear a seatbelt and the car must have enough seat belts for the number of passengers. The seatbelts should comply with current recognised safety standards.
- Foster carers should make sure that they have age appropriate car seats or booster seats for children/young people and that these are positioned correctly in relation to airbags if the foster family's car has them.
- Foster carers need to consider the appropriateness of transporting children alone in a car, in particular if the child/young person is known or suspected to have been abused and/or has made allegations of abuse.
- If a foster carer has to travel alone with a child/young person then the child/young person should sit in the back of the car. As a rule young children should not sit in the front seat of the foster carer's vehicle.

8.10 Holidays

- While many of the elements of a household's safer caring policy will be about behaviour and therefore relevant at all times, some will relate to the physical environment of the household. This will usually be the foster carer's family home but foster carers and social workers need to take account of other environments the foster carer(s) and child/young person may live in. This will include (but not be restricted to) where the foster carer(s) and child/young person are going on holiday or where the foster family has a second home or the use of a caravan.
- If foster carers have the regular use of a caravan or holiday home a separate health and safety questionnaire will be completed and submitted by the foster carer(s).
- When foster families take foster children/young people on holiday, whatever the destination, they should always try to adhere to their own safer caring policy.

- Foster carers should always notify the social worker(s) for a child / children placed, and their supervising social worker, of their holiday destination, address and dates and any means by which they can be contacted during this period.

8.11 When foster carers go out

Ref: Baby sitting a Child in Care in a Foster Care Placement

- As for any child, there will be times when foster children need to be cared for by baby-sitters or other carers while the foster carer(s) is/are out. Ideally two people should be used to baby-sit or provide alternative care but it is accepted that this may not be practicable.
- It is not advisable to use male babysitters/alternative carers unless the adult is well known to the child/young person.
- Supervising social workers should ensure that a Criminal Records Bureau check is sought for regular alternative carers if this was not completed during the assessment of the foster carers.
- Foster children/young people should not be left in the care of anyone under the age of 18.
- Foster children/young people should not be left alone in the sole charge of foster carer's birth children or ex foster children (now adult) without prior agreement with the child's/young person's social worker / the foster carer's supervising social worker.
- Foster carers should make sure that babysitters/alternative carers for the child/young person are familiar with the household routines and, as far as possible, adhere to these.

8.12 Guests, including relatives

Foster carers must inform their supervising social worker and the child's/young person's social worker if they are having staying guests, particularly if the stay is to last more than two days. What is important is that foster carers ensure that having guests to stay does not seriously compromise or interfere with their safer caring policy – for example guests should observe the same practices in relation to dress and showing affection and should respect the child's/young person's right to privacy.

8.13 Education about personal relationships, sex and sexuality

Ref: Sexual Relationship Education Policy

- Sexual development and an interest in sex is a normal and healthy aspect of the development of children and young people. Foster carers should feel able to discuss sex and relationships with children/young people and to give advice and guidance. However in addition to explaining biological facts or conveying biological information foster carers need to present this in the context of caring relationships, trust, respect and responsibility.
- The approach outlined above should take account of the religious and cultural background of the child/young person. For example in some cultures and religions sexual relationships between a male and female are only acceptable within the context of marriage.

- Foster carers should always inform their supervising social worker and the child/young person's social worker of any discussions that have taken place about sex and sexuality and make a record in their diary/daily log. The child's/young person's parents should be informed if possible.
- Foster carers should try to find out what information is being provided to children/young people by the school(s) attended and use this as a basis.

8.14 Bullying

Ref: Residential Procedures Counteracting Bullying

- Children/young people in foster care have sometimes missed out on the basic social skills which enable them to make friends. Low self-esteem may make them vulnerable to bullies and may also lead to them becoming bullies themselves. Bullies and their victims both need help. Bullying can take many forms and can seriously affect a young person's mental health. Young people often find it difficult to talk about bullying for a number of reasons but bullying is a problem that needs adult help.
- If foster carers believe the child / young person they are looking after is being bullied they should share their concern with the child's/young person's social worker and the supervising social worker at the earliest opportunity providing the evidence on which their concern is based e.g. child/young person 'losing' or badly needing money, loss of possessions, reluctance to attend school
- If a child/young person says he/she is being bullied then what the child/young person says should be taken seriously – many children/young people suffer in silence before telling anyone;
- Foster carers should not blame the child / young person and should reassure them that they were right to tell;
- Foster carers must not promise to keep the bullying a secret. They should reassure the child / young person that they and the teachers (if the bullying is happening at school) will try not to make things worse because they have told
- The school and child/young person's social worker should be informed so that they can address the problem and ensure that the school has a clear anti-bullying policy.
- Work with the young child/young person to find strategies to resist or challenge the bullying, or to take protective action, so it does not seriously damage their self-esteem.

Any action taken should be recorded in the foster carer diary/daily log.

8.15 Taking Photographs / Videos of Children and Young People

- Foster carers need to be sensitive to the feelings of children and their parents. Some children and adults will object to having their image recorded on film for religious or cultural reasons and their rights should be respected.
- In some cases the use of photographs and/or videos will be an important part of the work being undertaken with the child, for example to help prepare an advertisement for a permanent family or as part of life-story work. In all cases the foster carer(s)

should discuss the taking of photographs and making of video recordings with the child's/young person's social worker before doing so and obtain permission.

- The permission of the child/young person should also be sought and no child/young person should ever be photographed or filmed in the bath, in their night-clothes or underwear or undressed or in any circumstances that could be questionable. For example, when taking photographs of a child/young person this should not be done in an isolated area and other people should be included in the photograph if possible.
- If a child says 'no' to being video taped that should be respected and in no circumstances should any child be forced in front of a camera.
- Photographs or videos of children displaying challenging behaviours should not be taken
- The permission of the child's/young person's social worker, and the child/young person him/herself
- , should be obtained before any photographic or video material is made available to others.
- Foster carers should explain why they are taking photographs or making video recordings and should stop if a child/young person becomes upset or distressed or is clearly uncomfortable.

8.16 Names used

- Foster carers should avoid the use of the terms 'mummy' or 'daddy'. They are not the child's birth parents and the use of these terms is likely to confuse the child and can also antagonise or alienate parents and possibly other birth relatives. The use of foster carer's first names is the preferred option.
- With older children it may sometimes be appropriate for them to decide by what name they will address their foster carer(s), especially if the placement is a long term one. This should be discussed and agreed with the child's / young person's social worker who will have responsibility for consulting with / informing the birth parent(s).

8.17 Use of language

- Most families have words and terms they use to describe parts of the body or bodily functions such as going to the toilet. Foster carers need to consider the words they use and their potential meaning for foster children/young people.
- They also need to establish the terms the child/young person uses as soon as possible to avoid any distress to a child/young person who might be finding it difficult to express their needs.

8.18 Fire safety

- Foster carers need to ensure that their homes are fitted with smoke alarms. Battery alarms are acceptable, but should have their batteries replaced frequently.
- Foster carers should be especially careful about the safekeeping of matches and cigarette lighters and explain to children/young people why they are not allowed to have these.

- Foster carers should advise children/young people of exit routes from their home in the event of a fire.
- It is advisable not to have locks on internal doors.

8.19 Alcohol and Smoking

Ref: CIC Procedures Promoting the Health of Children in Care

- Alcohol, cigarettes, lighters and matches should be kept out of reach of young children and stored somewhere not easily accessible to children/young people.
- Foster carers should not smoke in the presence of children under 5 years old and children/young people of any age with respiratory difficulties.
- As far as practicable no fostered child / young person should be exposed to the hazards of secondary/passive smoking.
- Foster carers should exercise moderation if drinking alcohol in front of foster children/young people, either at the foster home or in other settings. Children/young people should not be exposed to foster carers being drunk.
- Foster carers should be sensitive to the possibility that alcohol may be a source of anxiety for a child/young person if alcohol misuse/abuse is or has been a major difficulty in their birth family, perhaps even one of the reasons why the child/young person is in foster care.

8.20 Drugs, Solvents and Aerosols

Ref: CIC Procedures Promoting the Health of Children in Care

- Foster carers should ensure that prescription drugs, proprietary medication, solvents and aerosols are kept locked away out of the reach of children/young people.
- If a child/young person has prescribed medication and the foster carer(s) is responsible for administering this then the prescribed dosage should never be exceeded
- A child/young person should never be denied his/her medication as a punishment or because the foster carer(s) think(s) he/she has no need of it or would do better without it.
- If a young person is taking responsibility for self-administering his/her medication then the foster carer(s) should ensure that he/she only has the prescribed amount and that the medication is stored safely out of reach or away from other children/young people.

8.21 Pets

- Foster carers should exercise supervision of contact between foster children/young people and pets as required and give priority to the safety and protection of a child/young person at all times.
- Sometimes it may be necessary to protect pets from unwelcome and worrying or unkind behaviours from children/young people.

- Foster children/young people should be encouraged and helped to observe good hygiene practices – for example washing hands after playing with pets or helping with cleaning out where a pet stays or rests.
- Front and rear gardens should be free of pet faeces at all times.

8.22 Children/young people witnessing appropriate adult relationships

Foster carers will need to ensure that that they exercise discretion in demonstrating affection to each other. While this is true for all children/young people, this is of particular importance for children/young people in care, some of whom may have been sexually abused or witnessed inappropriate behaviour from adults or other children/young people.

8.23 Access to unsuitable material

Ref; Children's Access to Computers and Internet Safety

- Children/young people in foster carer should not have access to published material, television or satellite channels, video or DVD recordings, or Internet facilities whereby they are likely to have sight of inappropriate material. No matter how much they pester, protest or insist that they were allowed to do so where they lived before, foster children/young people should not be allowed to watch television programmes the content of which is unacceptable or films that have a censorship rating that make them unsuitable viewing.
- Generally children/young people should have access to a computer in an open area of the foster home. Foster carers should ensure that children/young people are denied access to adult websites by the use of appropriate filters and that 'Safe Surfing' guidelines for children and young people, for example those produced by NCH, are observed.
- Foster carers should be alert to the fact that some adults are accessing children's/young people's websites. If foster carers notice anything of concern then they should make the child's/young person's social worker and their supervising social worker aware – it may be necessary to inform the Police
- Foster carers should be alert to how young people use their mobile phones. As with computers information which is unsuitable can be accessed or received.

8.24 Contact, including telephone contact

- Contact with birth families and others who are significant to the child is of major importance to children in care. There will be occasions when children have contact with people who are known to have abused them (they may also be having contact with people where neither the foster carer(s) nor the social worker are aware that abuse has previously taken place). Foster carers will need to devise strategies to manage contact that takes place in the foster home in a sensitive and safe manner.
- Where the contact needs to be supervised, the arrangements for this should be agreed in advance with the child's social worker and the foster carer(s) should ensure that they are able to dedicate all of their time to this task.
- Where the contact does not need formal supervision, the foster carer should find ways to respect the need for some privacy while at the same time remaining aware

of what is going on. Doors to rooms where contact is taking place should be kept open and the foster child/young person should be kept within the earshot of the foster carer(s) at all times.

- The foster carer(s) should ensure that the person having contact does not take the child/young person away from the place where the contact is taking place, unless this has been previously agreed with the child's/young person's social worker.
- Foster children and young people should be able to make and receive telephone calls from their birth family and friends when this has been agreed in the contact plan. Foster carers may need to be alert to how telephone calls are received without actually listening in. If a foster child/young person becomes upset by a telephone call then the foster carer(s) should take charge and end the call politely. The foster carer(s) should make a note of this and also inform their supervising social worker and the child's/young person's social worker.

8.25 Race, culture and religion

- The needs of both children and foster carers arising from race, religion and culture need careful consideration. While this is frequently considered in terms of identity or the physical and dietary needs of children, there are also other issues relating to safer caring. For example, some foster carers may say grace at mealtimes or pray as a family at other times. This may be of positive benefit to a child who shares the same religion, but potentially confusing and excluding to another child unless carefully explained. As a worst possible scenario prayer may be frightening to a child who has experienced ritualistic abuse.
- Taking photographs is an innocent part of the day to day life of many western families but can be seen as offensive to people of other religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality will also need careful consideration. Foster carers need to ensure that they consider their own attitude to these issues when drawing up their safer caring guidelines and discuss the individual needs of each child/young person with the child's/young person's social worker.

8.26 Children/young people with a disability

- Foster carers who are to foster children with a disability will need to give particular attention to ensuring their protection. The need for intimate personal care will have major implications for the child and the foster carer(s). The child may find it hard to distinguish this from other forms of touch and the carer(s) may be more vulnerable to allegations.
- Communication problems may make it harder for a child to tell and mobility problems will make it harder for children to run away or protect themselves from abuse.
- Signs and symptoms of abuse may be missed and put down to the child's behaviour or medical conditions.
- Children with a disability may have less knowledge and understanding about abuse and will find it more difficult to speak for themselves or make a complaint.

- Foster carers should minimise the potential for risk and misunderstanding by giving a clear commentary to the child/young person about the care that is to be provided. Provision of care should be consistent with that given to the child/young person in other settings e.g. by birth family, at school.

9.0 The Needs of Foster Carers' own Children

- 9.1 Over recent years the needs of carers' own children have been increasingly acknowledged. Fostering has a dramatic impact on all members of the household and the adjustments required will need to be carefully considered before a family decide that fostering is right for them.
- 9.2 It will be important for carers to find ways to meet their own children's needs while keeping all children in the household safe. For example, if their own children are no longer able to share their parents' bed because of the needs of foster children placed in the home, the foster carer(s) should find ways of giving their own children their close personal time in another way.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Safer caring should not prevent children and young people receiving the care they need. Carers need to find ways of showing care that are not open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Experienced carers say that you have to change the way you do things at home and that after a while this just becomes normal and does not stop you leading ordinary lives."

'Safer Caring', Fostering Network

10.0 Preparing for a placement

- 10.1 While foster carers will need to prepare their family safer caring policy in advance of their first placement, all family policies will need to be reviewed prior to each individual placement.
- 10.2 Some of the issues foster carers will need to consider are:
- How will they explain to the child/young person what is expected of them and other household members?
 - Do they have all the information they need to care for the child/young person safely?
 - Is the child/young person known to have been abused?
 - Do the particular needs of the child/young person mean that the usual family safer caring policy needs to be revised? If so, is this achievable and acceptable to all other members of the household?
 - What are the most important household rules that must be adhered to, and which are less significant?
 - How will unacceptable behaviour be dealt with, whoever displays it?

11.0 Foster Carer Training and Guidance

Training for foster carers includes training in caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse and on ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem **National Minimum Standards (2011)**

11.1 Improving children's own self-esteem is one of the most effective ways to enable children to help avoid becoming victims themselves. Supervising social workers should ensure that they pay attention to the training needs of carers and other members of their household, addressing these in the appraisal of training and development needs which must be documented in the foster carer's annual review report.

11.2 Supervising social workers should encourage foster carers to take advantage of any available training opportunities run by Stoke on Trent City Council or other agencies.

Further information

11.3 Further helpful guidance for all carers is contained within the **Fostering Network Safer Caring**' publication. This is made available to all foster carers on approval

11.4 Guidelines for short-break carers on the safer care of disabled children are contained within the **Shared Care Network 'Safe and Sound'** publication.