

POLICY ON PROMOTING THE LEISURE INTERESTS OF FOSTER CHILDREN



Introduction

This paper has been produced to outline to children, parents, foster carers and social workers Foster Care Link's policy on promoting the leisure interests of children placed in foster care.

Statutory Framework

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011 requires fostering service providers to ensure that foster parents promote the leisure interests of children placed with them (Standard 7).

The Importance of Leisure Interests in the Development of Children and Young People

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that every child has the right to rest and leisure, play and recreation.

At the most basic level, sports and cultural facilities enable children to play by providing stimuli, imaginative frameworks and settings. The belief that play, leisure and recreation are not only good things but have the serious purpose of providing the skills and experience needed in adulthood is well established and supported by research.

While they have intrinsic value, the promotion of leisure activities and programmes can also help overcome social exclusion and lead to positive outcomes in health, educational attainment, employment and crime reduction.

Arts and drama also have therapeutic applications and can help children, including those with disabilities, to express their feelings free of everyday constraints. More generally, opportunities for physical activity and for expressing creativity are recognised among the factors for enhancing mental well-being and combating a poor sense of identity or low self-esteem.

The existing leisure interests of children can also play an important role when the child becomes looked after. Attendance at say Scouts, may provide the child with their only stable point of reference in an otherwise dramatically changing world and provide the child with an opportunity to maintain contact with friends. Successful and continuing participation in other out of school activities, such as sporting clubs or music lessons, may help to improve the child's self esteem.

Planning

The child's hobbies, special interests and leisure activities will be among the factors taken into account when choosing a suitable foster placement.

Details of the arrangements to continue these into the placement should be recorded on the LAC Placement Plan Part 2 along with the arrangements for financing these activities.

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For children looked after for more than four months, the completion of an Assessment and Action Record will help children, social workers and carers identify areas where new interests might be explored or developed.

The child's Personal Education Plan should also be used to encourage children to develop leisure interests. For example, a child might wish to develop her or his athletic skills and to be selected for a school team, or to be successful in the audition for a school play.

The child's statutory review should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these plans and for ensuring that in this, as in all areas, the child's needs are being met as fully as possible.

The Role of Foster Carers

Foster carers have key formal and informal roles in the promotion of the leisure interests of children placed with them.

Formal roles include contributing to:

- Care Plans
- Placement Plans
- Child Care Reviews
- Assessment and Action Records
- Pathway Plans

Foster Care Link expects carers to prepare for and attend all relevant meetings in respect of the above and take a pro-active approach in the development and implementation of such plans.

The informal roles of carers are less easy to define but are at least as important as their formal roles.

Carers are best placed of all those in the child's network to encourage the child's participation in leisure activities on a day to day basis.

Once again, Foster Care Link expects carers to be pro-active and positive in carrying out this role, whilst balancing the need to encourage the young person to take on increasing levels of responsibility for their own life.

Such opportunities may include:

- Ensuring that the child learns to swim
- Ensuring that the child can ride a bike
- Encouraging the child to develop and maintain hobbies
- Encouraging the child to develop a love of reading and ensuring the child is a member of a library
- Playing with the child
- Teaching the child how to play with others and share

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- Encouraging the child to bring friends home to play
- Encouraging the child to join youth clubs or uniformed or religious organisations
- Encouraging the child to join school clubs or societies
- Supporting the child in developing information technology skills

This is far from an exhaustive list and there will be many other ways that individual children can be helped or encouraged by carers. Carers should be mindful of such opportunities and take them as they