

RECORDING POLICY AND GUIDANCE FOR CARERS



Introduction

This policy has been produced to make clear to carers their responsibilities with regard to recording and keeping records, during the course of their duties as a foster carer.

This policy does not cover records held by Foster Care Link in respect of carers and children which are the subject of a separate policy.

Statutory Framework

The activities of both foster carers and fostering services are governed by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The Standards and Regulations place duties on fostering services to maintain specific information on carer's files and retain these for specified periods of time. The expectations of carers are generally less explicit and for example requires carers to supply information about a child's health needs for the planning and review process but does not define in what format this should be provided.

In two respects the Standards are specific and that is with regard to recording the outcome of contact arrangements. They require carers to record not just the outcome but the perceived outcome on the child and feedback this information to the child's social worker.

The Standards require the fostering service to train carers in how to record significant life events for the child and to encourage the child to make such recordings.

Specific guidance is given on both of these areas further on in this document.

General Record Keeping

Case recording is not an activity which is separate to social work practice, but rather an integral part of the social work service agencies provide to children and families. This applies equally to fostering services and their carers.

The records kept by carers are important for a number of reasons:

- They may be needed as evidence in Court proceedings
- They may contribute to an assessment of the child and/or his or her parents
- They are a valuable tool in monitoring a child's progress
- They can provide the child and future carers with an understanding of the child's past and early life experiences

While each carer will have their own recording style, a number of key principles should apply:

- Records should be typed or hand-written in black ink for ease of copying
- All factual information should be checked for accuracy eg spelling of names

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- Records should be completed as soon after the event they refer to as possible
- If different from the date of the incident, the date the record is made should be stated
- Records should be free from jargon and abbreviations should never be used.
- Corrections made to records previously made should be dated and signed.
- Records should distinguish between facts and the opinions of the carer.

The amount of recording needed will vary from placement to placement. As a minimum, carers should maintain a daily diary in which they not only record appointments but can also note down significant events or incidents for the child that happened on that day.

Some carers may use a diary for more detailed observations on the child while others will use it as an aide for their memory when preparing reports for meetings such as looked after reviews.

Health Records

Foster Care Link will seek to ensure that the placing authority provide the carer with the Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) of any child placed along with copies of any relevant health assessments.

The carer will be expected to ensure that the PCHR is kept up to date and returned to the child's social worker at the end of the placement.

The carer should also record details of:

- Any illnesses suffered by the child
- Any medical, dental or optical appointments or treatment in respect of the child

Education Records

The arrangements for monitoring a child's progress at school (such as who attends parent's evenings and whom reports are sent to) should be included in the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan.

Carers should ensure they record any significant issues in respect of a child's education and return any relevant papers or reports to the child's social worker at the end of the placement.

Contact

Carers should pay particular attention to ensure that the outcome of contact arrangements and their perceived impact on the child are recorded. Such records are crucial in assessing and monitoring the benefits of contact for the child, the progress of plans for rehabilitation and may be needed as evidence in Court proceedings.

While each child and each contact session may be different, carers should consider the following issues in every case:

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- The date and time of the contact
- Was this contact planned and agreed in advance?
- The type of contact (eg face to face or telephone)
- Who was present at the contact?
- Did everyone who was due to turn up do so and were they on time?
- Was the contact supervised and if so by whom?
- How long did contact last?
- Was this the scheduled length of time for this contact?
- The child's demeanour before, during and after the contact
- Was the child comfortable with those involved in the contact?
- Was the child anxious or reluctant to engage with anyone?
- The demeanour of others present during contact
- How did those attending contact respond to the child?
- Were agreed tasks for this contact completed?
- How did the contact end?
- Was it clear to the child if and when (s)he would have further contact?
- Was the child given anything during the contact such as presents or money?
- Did anyone put the child under undue pressure during the contact?

Carers should ensure that they fully record where relevant any of the above issues and feedback this information to the child's social worker as soon as possible.

Life Events

The carer's role in direct work with the child in terms of making sense of their past and present will vary from placement to placement. Any specific tasks to be undertaken will be subject to negotiation with the child's social worker and should be included in the Care Plan and Placement Agreement.

In all cases however, carers should ensure that they record significant life events for the child. This may be in the form of specific recording on a daily basis that can be passed to the child or social worker at the end of the placement. It may be a note of significant events such as school sports days or contact visits.

Significant milestones such as the loss of a first tooth or the first time a baby walked should always be recorded and passed on as it is likely that this information will otherwise be unknown to the child's parents or future alternative permanent carers.

Significant items such as a new born baby's hospital identity tag or cards from birth family members should be kept and passed on to the child or social worker at the end of the placement.

Control and Sanctions

Carers must record all incidents involving physical restraint.

Carers will need to exercise their own judgement as to when other forms of control and discipline warrant recording.

Some of the issues carers need to take into account include:

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- Did the child view the action taken as fair and appropriate?
- Was the action taken discussed with and/or witnessed by others?
- Was the action taken agreed by the child's social worker and/or birth parents?
- Could any other party misconstrue the action taken or view it as inappropriate?

If the carer is in any doubt about whether any action taken should be recorded or not, then this is probably an indication that it should. In such circumstances the carer should record the incident and bring it to the attention of the child's social worker at the earliest possible opportunity.

Where there is a need to record the use of control or sanctions, carers must complete a copy of Foster Care Link's Incident Report Form and forward this to their supervising social worker within one working day of the incident. Foster Care Link will ensure that a copy of the form is forwarded to the child's social worker the same day.

Children Missing from Placement

Carers need to be aware of the possibility that a child may go missing from the placement. This may be at the instigation of the child or an adult.

All unauthorised absences should be recorded and reported in line with Foster Care Link's separate procedure on 'Foster Child Missing from Foster Home'.

To aid in the process of finding a missing child, carers should ensure that they are able to give an accurate description of the child and any obvious identifying features. Ideally this will be by means of an up to date photograph. Whether such a photograph is available or not, carers should ensure that they keep a mental note of what a child is wearing each time they leave the house. If the carer has reason to suspect that the child may go missing they should commit this mental note to paper.

Bullying

Foster carers should record all suspected and actual incidents of bullying against or by any foster child in their care. These should be reported to the child's social worker as soon as possible.

The carer should also ensure that their supervising social worker is made aware of the incident. Foster Care Link will keep a central record of all reported incidents and the action taken to deal with them. (See also Bullying Policy)

Accidents

All accidents experienced by foster children must be fully recorded as soon after the accident as possible.

The child's social worker must be informed of the accident verbally as soon as possible.

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Carers must complete a copy of Foster Care Link's Incident Report Form and forward this to their supervising social worker within one working day of the accident. Foster Care Link will ensure that a copy of the form is forwarded to the child's social worker the same day.

Videos and Photographs

Carers need to be mindful that families and children may hold beliefs that do not allow for photographic or video material to be recorded.

Where this is acceptable, care must be taken to ensure that no child is photographed or recorded in the bath or in a state of undress. While such an approach may at first appear heavy handed, for both the sake of the child and the carer such discretion needs to be exercised at all times.

Copies of any video or photographic material should be made available to the child and/or her/his parents when they leave a placement. The additional costs incurred are the responsibility of the placing authority and Foster Care Link will recover these from the placing authority and reimburse the carer.

Confidentiality

Carers will be provided with sensitive and personal information on both children placed and other family members. The records carers create are also likely to contain such information. Carers must at all times be mindful of their responsibilities in terms of confidentiality and only share such information where they have a clear responsibility to do so or where the sharing of information is clearly in the best interests of the child.

The former will include situations such as providing information for a child's looked after review.

The latter may include for example, the need to share information in respect of a child's health care needs with education staff.

Care should also be taken to ensure that information is not accidentally disclosed by the overhearing of telephone conversations or other discussions.

Storage and Retention of Records

During the course of a placement, carers should ensure that information is kept secure and cannot be accessed by anyone else. Ideally this should be in a lockable file or cabinet that is also fire and waterproof.

At the end of a placement, any reports or other records provided to the carer in respect of the child should be returned to the child's social worker or to Foster Care Link.

The carer should retain other information, such as diaries securely, for as long as is reasonably practicable. If a carer ceases to foster and wishes to dispose of retained confidential information, they should first discuss this with their supervising social worker.