



Worcestershire
FOSTERING

Health and Safety for Foster Carers

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1. Introduction and Legal Framework

Worcestershire Fostering aims to promote and safeguard children and young people by providing foster homes which offer a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. This policy sets out how Worcestershire Fostering meets the requirements set out below and provides foster carers with guidance on Worcestershire Fostering's expectations. Promoting the individual health needs of children is covered in a separate policy Worcestershire Fostering's **Promoting the Health Needs of Looked after Children.**

The Statutory Fostering Guidance (2011) states that

“The fostering service must have a written health and safety policy, which should be covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Foster carers should be supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standard of care being provided.”

Standard 10 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS) provides more detail and requires that:

- The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child.
- The foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. Outdoor spaces which are part of the premises are safe, secure and well maintained.
- Foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.
- Foster carers understand the service's policy concerning safety for children in the foster home and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The service's policy is regularly reviewed in line with the most recent guidance from relevant bodies.
- The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.
- In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

2. Health and Safety Procedure

Worcestershire Fostering uses the Coram\BAAF Home Safety Checklist and this is completed at a minimum during the assessment of foster carers and as part of their annual review. It can also be completed with foster carers if there are any concerns about health and safety in the foster home.

Assessment and Annual Review

The assessing social worker will during the assessment ensure that the foster home is warm, adequately furnished and that the proposed foster carers are able to maintain a good standard of hygiene and cleanliness. Outdoor spaces will also be expected to be safe and secure and well maintained. During the assessment there will be discussion on the number of looked after children who can be comfortably accommodated in the foster home with reference to guidance on bedroom sharing.

Worcestershire Fostering expect unrelated children who are looked after and placed with non-related carers to have their own rooms (unless they are babies in a foster carer's room).

For children placed with family and friends' carers, taking into consideration the benefits of a family placement, children may share with other family members on the basis that a Bedroom Sharing Risk Assessment (please see Worcestershire Fostering's **Making Placements Policy**) is completed and the arrangement is agreed by the relevant Team Manager and regularly reviewed.

As part of the foster carer's annual review the supervising social worker and the foster carer will review whether they continue to meet the expected standards with regards to the Health and Safety policy and whether the number of children they are approved for is appropriate. If there any concerns about whether the foster home is safe or about the standards of hygiene and cleanliness of the foster home these should be addressed with the foster carer immediately and an action plan with timescales agreed.

3. Home Safety Checklist

The guidance below provides general information on expectations for carers. The Home Safety Checklist (Appendix1) should be referred to for more detailed guidance

Fire Safety

All fostering households should have their own fire evacuation plan in which they consider how they would escape from the home in the event of a fire. This should be shared in an age-appropriate way with any children who are placed with them and ensure that all household members know what to do.

Foster carers are expected to have a smoke detector on each floor of their home. When these are battery operated, they should regularly test the batteries and replace them annually. The assessing or supervising social worker will also test the batteries when undertaking a Home Safety Check.

Chimneys need to allow free passage of dangerous combustion gasses. Regular cleaning will remove soot and creosote, helping prevent dangerous chimney fires. Cleaning will increase the efficiency of some appliances and ensure that any bird nests, cobwebs or other blockages are removed. The frequency of sweeping will depend on a number of factors, e.g. type of fuel, appliance used, duration of use, content of wood fuel. The table below sets out Worcestershire Fostering's minimum expectations.

Smokeless fuel	At least once a year
Wood	Every 6 months
Bituminous Coal Bituminous coal:	Every 6 months
Oil and Gas	Once a year

Electrical equipment in the home should be regularly checked to ensure that it is in safe working order. Electric leads should be tidy and not trailing over walk areas and sockets should not be overloaded. Any electrical work should be undertaken by qualified and registered electrician.

Falls

Carpets - should be in good condition without worn areas which could cause trips and falls.

Windows - access to open windows should be prevented and foster carers should not place furniture or shelves which children could climb on under windows. Child resistant window restrictors should be fitted to prevent windows to opening more than 100mm taking into account the fire evacuation plan.

Stair Gates - Stair gates must be fitted correctly and used to restrict access to stairs or steps where toddlers or young children could fall and any rooms where it is necessary to restrict access by toddlers and young children.

Bunk Beds - Age guidance provided by manufacturers of bunk beds should be followed. However, the general rule unless manufacturers say differently is that children should not sleep on the top bunk if they are under 6 years of age or over 14 years of age.

Moses Baskets - If using a Moses Basket, it is the responsibility of the carer to ensure that it is kept in good condition. In particular the straps need to be sturdy if carrying a baby in the basket.

Outdoor play equipment - should be kept in good working order. Foster carers should consider the surface and immediate surroundings ensuring that there are no sharp edges or hard materials for a child to fall on.

Trampolines - Must have safety nets and 'spring' covers. The manufacturer's recommendation on age range should be followed.

Burns and Scalds

Fireguards - foster carers should have fireguards around any open fires, wood burners, gas or electric fires. Consideration should be given to managing any possible risk from other heat sources including radiators, kettles, hair tongs etc. The precautions required will depend on the age and understanding of the child in placement.

Cooker Safety Guards - Consideration should be given to whether cooker safety guards are required when children are vulnerable, or it is difficult to keep them out of the kitchen.

Baths - Foster carers need to take care with the temperature of hot water both at the tap and baths etc. Checking processes need to be in place for young and vulnerable children.

Strangulation and Suffocation

Curtain Cords/hanging toys and items with drawstrings – consideration should be given on whether this poses a hazard to a child.

Toys - should be suitable for the age and ability of the child. Foster Carers should always check that they meet safety standards and that small items such as buttons or eyes on toys would not cause choking to a child if swallowed.

Poisoning

Medicines - should be kept out of reach of children and whenever possible under lock and key.

Cleaning products etc. - it is important that foster carers read the manufacturer's instructions on the use of cleaning products, weed killer, paint, inflammable materials, aerosols etc. and store them safely, keeping them out of reach of children and in line with the instructions on the container.

Foster Carers should not store chemicals in inappropriate containers (i.e. milk bottles, plastic drinks cups).

Plants - Whilst many plants are safe to handle and investigate, there are some which are poisonous or have poisonous parts. Some children may be particularly vulnerable because of asthma or allergies. Foster carers need to be aware of what's growing in their garden, the weeds as well as the flowers and plants.

Drowning

Baths – Foster carers should ensure that babies and young children are always supervised while in the bath. Where older children may be more vulnerable due to health needs such as epilepsy how this is managed by the foster carer should form part of the child's Safer Caring\Individual Risk Assessment which is completed at the start of their placement and regularly reviewed.

Ponds, pools and other water - Access to any swimming pools, ponds, rivers or streams should be controlled according to the age and understanding of the child. Consideration should be given to the use of locks and keys, fences and gates which can be secured should be, and pond covers or grids should be used. Swimming pools should never be used by children without supervision by an adult. Any water activities must be suitably assessed and supervised at all times.

Cutting injuries

Glass -Any low-level glass must be safety, toughened glass or protected with safety film which can be applied to the window or doors.

Greenhouses\cold frames – safety glass or plastic/perspex should be used or greenhouses should be fenced off to restrict access.

Knives and Sharp Implements including Ceremonial Swords -. All knives and sharp implements such as razors can be hazardous and should always be stored safely (this may vary with different children who are placed).

Equipment and hobby tools - this includes gardening equipment like lawn mowers, strimmers, indoor appliances, sewing machines, workshop equipment etc. should be safely stored and correctly maintained. Children should be supervised according to their age and understanding and wear safety equipment is required foster carers should ensure children are using this e.g. protective goggles or gloves.

Vehicle Safety (including car seats)

Foster carers are required to have up to date road vehicle tax , MOT certificate if needed and up to date insurance and will be required to provide evidence of this to their assessing or supervising social worker.

Car Seats - Up to date information about the current law regarding car seats can be found at www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules and should be followed by foster carers. In summary children must normally use a child car seat until they're 12 years old or 135 centimeters tall, whichever comes first. Children over 12 or more than 135cm tall must wear a seat belt. Foster carers can choose a child car seat based on the child's height or weight and more detail on this can be found on the government website.

Foster carers must only use a child car seat if their car's seat belt has a diagonal strap, unless the car seat is either:

- specifically designed for use with a lap seat belt
- fitted using ISOFIX anchor points

they must also:

- deactivate any front airbags before fitting a rear-facing baby seat in a front seat
- not fit a child car seat in side-facing seats

The same rules apply for children with disabilities unless a doctor says they're exempt on medical grounds. They can use a disabled person's seat belt or child restraint designed for their needs.

For further information regarding any situations where a child can travel without a car seat or any updates on the above information regarding car seats see www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules/when-a-child-can-travel-without-a-car-seat

Firearms

Worcestershire Fostering will complete a gun questionnaire with any foster carer in possession of a firearm. Foster carers are required to meet the Firearm Regulations 1998 and ensure that they are stored securely to prevent unauthorized people including looked after children accessing them.

Pets and Livestock

Worcestershire Fostering has a pet questionnaire that must be completed on all household pets as part of the assessment and annual review process. Where a new pet is introduced to the household or there is a change in the pet's circumstances the foster carer should inform their supervising social worker. In some situations, it will be appropriate to undertake a risk assessment.

If foster carers have livestock such as chickens, horses or farm animals the supervising social worker may need to seek further information on what contact a looked after child is likely to have with the animals and what safety measures will be undertaken by the foster carers.

4. Other Activities

There are a number of other areas that are not covered in the Home Safety Check list and there is guidance on some of these below. The list is not exhaustive, and the general rule is that foster carers are expected to act as good parents and as such take steps and support looked after children to ensure they are safe.

Activities which include a degree of risk

The decision-making and any assessment of risk to the child or young person should be undertaken on the same basis as any reasonable parent would do. When making decisions regarding hazardous activities foster carers should consider what the risks are and whether the activity is supervised by a suitably qualified person if applicable. Foster carers should be clear that they have the delegated authority to make a decision regarding the activity. If a foster carer is unsure if they have this authority or has any concerns regarding the activity, they should discuss it with their supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

Road Safety

Foster carers should work with children to help them understand road risks. As well as ensuring that children understand when and where to cross roads foster carers should model good practice for example by crossing at pedestrian crossings or waiting for the green light whenever possible.

Cycling

Foster carers should ensure that children use bikes that are the correct size for the child and correctly maintained with stabilisers if required. Children should wear appropriate helmets and reflective clothing should be worn on roads. Children should also be encouraged to attend cycling proficiency/road safety courses. If children refuse to wear the appropriate protective clothing foster carers should inform their supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

Smoking

Children should be made aware of the dangers of smoking and alcohol and foster carers should lead by example. Alcohol, cigarettes, matches and lighters should be stored appropriately and should never be left where young children can access them.

Worcestershire Fostering has a Smoking Policy and this gives further detail on the requirements of foster carers and the possible restriction around their approval terms. (for further information please see Worcestershire Fostering's **Smoking and Vaping policy**).

5. Hygiene and Cleanliness

The decoration, cleanliness and hygiene practices in each foster home should be of an acceptable standard. Worcestershire Fostering accepts that different people have different standards, and what is clean and tidy to one may not be regarded as such by another. The standard set by the Fostering Service is one where obvious hygiene rules are followed and where the home is basically clean, furniture is comfortable, clean of animal hair and other debris.

Worcestershire Fostering are not looking to set standards that are impossible for a busy foster family to keep to: but ones where children will be comfortable, safe, protected from avoidable infections, and can be taught principles of hygienic self-care.

Where children are present in a home, Worcestershire Fostering expected that play areas will not always be tidy, or where older children have responsibility for their own rooms, they may not keep them to the standard of the rest of the household.

6. Unannounced Visits

Although it is not necessary for the supervising social worker to complete a full Home Safety Check during the unannounced visit they will consider issues of health and safety. For example, are windows and doors locked, are the stairgates and fire guards in place if appropriate.

They will also be expected to visit all areas of the home, this includes the garden and any outbuildings. The supervising social worker will check that standards of furnishing, hygiene and cleanliness are consistent throughout the home e.g. bedrooms for looked after children are of the same standard as other bedrooms within the foster home with the understanding that where older children have responsibility for their own rooms, they may not keep them to the standard of the rest of the household.

Where children and young people are present, whether looked after or children of the foster carers, their permission will be sought to view their rooms. Supervising social worker should explain the reason for the request and be clear that it is not about whether bedrooms are tidy.

If the social worker has any concerns they should be discussed with the foster carer during the visit and an appropriate action plan agreed with timescales.

7. Health and Safety of Foster Carers and Household members

Worcestershire Fostering aims to promote and safeguard the health and safety of foster carers and their families by:

- Ensuring foster carers are supervised and supported by a named supervising social worker
- Formal supervision will focus on the needs of the fostering household as well as the needs of the looked after children
- Ensuring that foster carers have full information about any child placed and that any new information is shared with them
- Offering access to training appropriate to the foster carer's needs.
- Access to the Emergency Duty Team when they need support or advice out of office hours
- Access to an Independent Advice and Mediation Worker
- Household membership of Fostering Network who can provide a range of services to foster carers.

Matching

Worcestershire Fostering will not place a child with a foster carer unless it can reasonably expect the foster carer, with support if necessary, to safeguard and meet that child's needs. Worcestershire Fostering will give foster carers all the information it has available about the behaviour of children it is seeking to place. This will enable the foster carer and their supervising social worker to decide whether a placement is appropriate for the foster carer and their household as well as for the child concerned.

Information about children should reduce the risks of harm to the foster carers and their household however foster carers need to be aware that Worcestershire Fostering may not have full information on a child and there could be aspects of the child's health or behaviour that could pose a risk to a foster carer or their household. In the initial stages of a placement, foster carers need to bear this in mind, and take action to reduce any potential risks and adhere to their Safer Caring Policies (see **Worcestershire Fostering's Safer Caring Policy**).

Training

Learning the skills to cope with different situations will contribute to promoting the foster carer's own health and safety and that of their household as well as the children they foster. Following assessment and prior to each annual review the foster carer's supervising social worker will draw up a Personal Development Plan with the foster carer to support them to meet the needs of the children they are looking after and develop their skills and knowledge to enable them to offer placements to children with a range of needs. Worcestershire Fostering has a responsibility to provide this training but foster carer also has a responsibility to attend.

Foster Carer's Health

Foster Carers should report any significant change in their own or members of their household, emotional and physical wellbeing as soon as possible. The foster carer's supervising social worker will need to discuss with them whether this may affect their ability to continue to meet children's needs as a foster carer, and whether it could pose a health and safety risk to the foster carer and or their long-term wellbeing.

In some situations, the foster carer may be able to continue to foster with additional support (Please refer to **Worcestershire Fostering's Supervision and Support of Foster Carers**). Where there is a need for foster carers to go 'on hold' this can be agreed for a maximum period of 12 months. When foster carers are 'on hold' their supervising social worker will maintain regular contact with them and continue to offer the fostering household support.

In some circumstances if there have been changes in the fostering household the relevant Team Manager may decide that a full review should be held before the foster carer starts fostering again.