

Assessment of a Partner for Single Foster Carers

Fostering Services (England) 2011

Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, Standards 13 and 19

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services

1. Introduction

Single foster carers will on occasion form partnerships and significant relationships.

Definition of partner: a significant person with whom the foster carer is having/intending/expected to develop a relationship, which is committed and serious.

This guidance is not intended to cover occasional dating situations, which occur outside of the foster home.

For safe caring reasons, an 'assessment' of the partner is required, and a discussion/decision is needed around the following issues:

- When to start an assessment;
- What to include in an assessment.

2. When to begin an assessment

If a foster carer is single at the point of application their initial approval should explore what would happen should they form a partnership or a significant relationship. For foster carers who experience separation or divorce, whilst fostering, relationships should be covered as part of their change of circumstances review as a single foster carer.

There is an expectation that foster carers conduct their relationships in the following manner:

- The foster carer would be expected to carry on any relationship within the context of a safe caring policy;
- The supervising social worker should be informed that the foster carer is in a relationship.
- The carer should be aware that an assessment would be needed at some point.

The timing of such an assessment is important although it is recognised that the service may be asking the foster carer to decide upon the 'status' of their relationship before the 'natural course of events' has occurred.

This is a difficult position in which to place the foster carer. However, the nature of fostering and the safe caring issues involved are such that the foster carer and the foster carer's partner must accept this position.

There are different stages of a relationship and different levels of assessment should occur at different stages. For the purpose of this situation, the relationship has been defined in four different stages but it is accepted that the progress of the relationship, between the stages, will vary in each individual situation.

3. Four stage process

Stage one: Initial stages of the relationship (i.e.) no contact with foster child/home.

- Foster carer to inform the supervising social worker that they are beginning a relationship. The impact of this relationship upon the foster carer to be addressed by the supervising social worker.
- Supervising social worker to reiterate that an assessment will be needed **if** the relationship progresses;
- Supervising social worker recommends that the foster carer informs the partner of her/his fostering status and that this will lead to a future assessment.

Stage two: partner intends to become a visitor to the foster home.

- The foster carer must inform the supervising social worker of the partner's intention to visit the foster home **prior** to visits taking place.
- The supervising social worker meets with the partner to explain the assessment process and the need for statutory checks to be undertaken.
- An application for an enhanced DBS disclosure is made. Whilst the partner can visit the foster home before the outcome of the DBS is known the foster carer must supervise the partner's contact with fostered children at all times;
- The child's social worker should talk to the foster child/ren about the partner to gain their understanding and views

Stage three: partner visits and stays over at the foster home when the foster children are in placement.

- Outcome of DBS check **must** be known for this to occur;
- Where a single foster carer takes a partner who will be sharing the care of any foster children, early consideration is given to the partner making an

application to foster. The foster carer must discuss this with their supervising social worker so that agreement can be reached about the best way to update their assessment and to assess the partner for approval as a foster carer within an appropriate timescale.

- The views and wishes of the partner are sought. Statutory checks and references (two personal and one paid employment if they work with vulnerable people) are sought. References also to be sought of former partner(s) children parented as/if applicable. partner enrolled onto Foundation Training;
- A Confidentiality Statement should be signed by the partner.
- The supervising social worker should give the partner information about the allegations/ complaint procedures.
- The supervising social worker reviews the Safe Caring Policy for the foster household to reflect the change in household composition.
- The supervising social worker, in conjunction with the foster carer and the partner, confirms the involvement of the partner in respect of child care responsibilities within the household.
- If the partner does not want to be considered as a partner foster carer, an assessment will still need to be made of their intended/actual role within the household in relation to children placed. This is when a **Person on the Periphery** assessment should be completed The foster carer and the partner should also sign an undertaking that they understand and intend to keep within their respective roles and responsibilities and that safeguarding training is also made available to the partner.

Stage four: partner moves into the foster home.

- Supervising social worker progresses to a full assessment assessment of the partner as a foster carer.
- The assessment will form part of the foster carer's review process as part of the requirement to consider a significant change in household membership;
- The assessment of the partner should include the following:
 - i. Individual profile/background history/ previous relationships with significant adults/children;
 - ii. Relationship with the foster carer, dynamics of the partnership and impact of partnership within the foster household;
 - iii. Relationship with the foster child/ren;

- iv. Joint competence (partner and foster carer) to care safely for children, commitment to fostering and ability/potential to work in partnership with the department.
- The foster carer review should be presented to the fostering panel with a recommendation as to the suitability of the partner to act as a foster carer, the suitability of the foster carer to continue to act as a foster carer, the suitability of the partnership to act jointly as foster carers and the suitability of their household and the terms of approval

END