

## Looked After Children

*Information for family and friends who are asked to care for a child who needs to be looked after by the local authority*

[www.hartlepool.gov.uk](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk)

June 2014

### What does 'looked after' mean?

A child who is looked after by the local authority is "in care". If a child is in care it will be because either the child is subject to a court order, which means the local authority shares parental responsibility, or the child will be "accommodated", which means that the child's parent (or someone with parental responsibility for the child) has agreed that the local authority should look after him or her.

The child may need to be looked after for a wide range of reasons which could include because they have suffered significant harm.

Whether the child is looked after under a court order or by agreement with the parents, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the child is placed with carers who are able to meet his/her needs. The local authority has a legal duty to consider placing the child with a relative or friend providing that person can meet the child's needs.

### What will this mean for me?

If you agree to care for a child who is looked after by the local authority, he or she will come to live with you under the Fostering Services Regulations 2010, which means you will be the child's foster carer. Under these Regulations all foster carers, whether they are related to the child or not must be assessed and approved. You will therefore be asked to take part in an assessment of your personal circumstances.

### What does the assessment involve?

The main aim of all assessments is to ensure that the foster carers will be able to keep the child safe. The assessment(s) will be undertaken by a social worker

In an emergency the local authority can place a child with a relative or friend who is not an approved foster carer for up to 16 weeks. However, if it is necessary to place a child with you in an emergency, the social worker must:

- Consult with the parents/people with parental responsibility for the child to obtain their permission to place the child with you.
- Seek legal advice if parents refuse permission and the child is considered to be at risk.

- If the child is old enough, talk them about their feelings about the proposed stay with you.
- Undertake checks with the police on all members of your household who are over 18 years of age
- Inspect your home and the proposed sleeping arrangements for the child
- Complete a health and safety questionnaire with you.
- Complete a foster care agreement with you.
- Complete a foster placement agreement with you.
- Prepare a report for their manager with a recommendation about how a placement with you would meet the child's needs.

### **What happens after the child comes to live with me?**

Once a child comes to live with you, a more detailed assessment of your family circumstances will be undertaken. You may think it is unnecessary for relatives or friends who are already caring for a child to be assessed to become foster carers, but a further assessment is a legal requirement. This assessment is also important as it gives you the opportunity to think carefully about the commitment you are taking on to care for and make sure that the child is happy, safe, well and secure in the longer term.

The assessment will consider issues such as: how you feel about the child being separated from his/her parents; how you feel if the child has been neglected or abused by their parents; the reactions of other family members to you caring for the child; how you will help the child keep in contact with other family members; how you will cope with conflicts of loyalty in the family; how you will manage a child's behaviour, how caring for a child will effect your own family members; as well as practical issues such as your home, finance, health and employment and proposed arrangements for childcare.

During the assessment, the social worker will:

- Ask you to complete a foster carer application form.
- Ask you to complete enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) applications (for all members of the household over 18 years). The DBS check searches your details and may reveal convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings.
- Ask you to give your consent to checks being made about you, your adult children, partner and any previous partners, with other agencies, personal referees and employers.
- Ask you to have a medical with your own GP.
- Talk to your own children to find out how they feel about the placement.
- Work with you to prepare a report about your family background, family relationships, experience of looking after children and your current circumstances, which will identify how you can meet the child's needs. This will involve several visits to you at home to discuss all these issues.
- You will be invited to read, comment on and sign the finished report which will be

presented to the Family Placement Panel. The Family Placement Panel is a multi-agency group that ensures that good quality recommendations are made about the approval of foster carers.

- You can attend the Panel meeting if you want to and the Panel will make a recommendation about whether or not you should be approved as foster carers for the child.
- The Agency Decision Maker will then make a decision about whether you should be registered as a foster carer. The Agency Decision Maker for fostering is NOT a member of the Panel but is a person or persons from the department who can make decisions on behalf of the Council in relation to matters upon which the Panel have made a recommendation.
- The Agency Decision Maker does not attend Panel. He or she must not have been involved in the direct management or assessment of any applicant involved.

### **What if I have health problems or a criminal record?**

Assessments of family and friends will always focus on your relationship with the child or children you are caring for and how you make sure that they are happy, well and safe. The assessment does not consider how you would care for any child, as is the case for other foster carer applicants. A criminal record or health problems will not necessarily prevent you from being approved as a family and friends foster carer. The assessment will look at how any such issues may impact upon the care of the child. What matters is whether you can keep the child safe and whether you can promote the child's health, education, social and emotional well being. Your assessment will consider your individual circumstances and the specific needs of the child you will be caring for and what support you might need to care successfully for the child.

However, if you do have any offences against children this will automatically disqualify you from becoming a foster carer.

If you are approved as a foster carer, you will have an annual review to consider whether you should continue to be a foster carer.

### **Will I receive any financial support?**

As a foster carer, you will receive a weekly foster care allowance. Allowances are designed to cover all the costs of caring for a looked after child, e.g. food (including school dinners), clothing, pocket money, school expenses, social and leisure activities, travel, and additional household costs, such as laundry, heating, general wear and tear and household insurance. Additional allowances are paid on the child's birthday and at Christmas to help with the cost of presents.

Fostering allowances are not classed as taxable income.

## Will the fostering allowance affect my benefits?

Fostering allowances do not generally affect means-tested benefit payments, such as Income Support, Job Seeker's Allowance etc.

## Can I claim Child Benefit?

If you receive a fostering allowance in respect of a child, you are not entitled to claim Child Benefit. You cannot claim benefits for a child you are fostering, including free school meals. If, however, the child placed with you has a disability, you may be able to claim certain benefits. The child's social worker will advise you of entitlements.

## What are my responsibilities as a foster carer?

The main responsibilities of any foster carer are to keep the child safe and to provide a good standard of physical and emotional care and support. Foster carers also need to make sure the child's health needs are met and you may be asked to register the child with a GP and dentist and take him/her to medical appointments. You are also responsible for making sure that the child attends nursery or school.

Foster carers are required to keep to the arrangements made for contact between the child and his/her parents. If you are asked to supervise any contact, you must make sure that you fully understand what is being asked of you by the social worker. Support will be provided to help you manage contact and support the child through contact.

As a foster carer, you will be expected to keep the social worker informed of any important changes and events in the child's day-to-day life and you will be invited to attend any meetings about the child.

You will be expected to allow the social worker to visit your home and see the child – the social worker will want to see the child alone. As a foster carer, you will be allocated a supervising social worker and you will be expected to meet regularly with her.

## What do I do about the child's family?

The child's social worker should talk to you about the arrangements for the child to see his/her parents or other family members.

Children placed with foster carers who are relatives or friends may have many opportunities to maintain relationships with family members. A placement with a family member or friend can help a child to maintain a sense of belonging and not to feel "different" from their friends at school.

However, not all family relationships will be positive. It is possible that there may be restrictions around the child's contact with certain people, relating to the reasons why the child needs to be looked after e.g. if a child has been physically or sexually abused, or is considered to be at risk.

As a foster carer, you will need to find a balance between making sure the child feels safe and secure with you and helping the child to keep in touch with their parents and other family members as agreed with the social worker. This may cause some conflict of loyalty for you, particularly if you are closely related to the child's parents. You may want to be supportive to the child's parents because you care about them very much. You may feel a sense of guilt, or feel angry towards social services because of the situation your family is in. As a foster carer, it is important that you remember your role is to put the child's needs first and to work with the local authority, as well as the parents, to meet the child's needs. At times this might bring you into conflict with the child's parents.

You may have strong feelings about the reasons why the child is looked after and might feel angry or negative about the child's parents. It is very important not to share these feelings with the child, who may feel quite differently. Children need to feel that they can talk about their parents openly and won't feel able to if they think you are not likely to listen with an open mind. It might be as important for children to feel positive about their parents as it is for them to see them. The way in which foster carers talk about parents or treat them when they see them will influence how the child feels about their parents and their placement with you.

### **Is there anything I can't do if I am a foster carer?**

Foster carers do not have parental responsibility for the children they are caring for. If there are any important decisions to be made about a child's health, education, contact etc, the foster carer must talk to the social worker who will be able to give advice.

Foster carers **do not** have the authority to consent to any form of medical treatment for a child placed with them. Foster carers should always consult the child's social worker regarding issues of medical consent.

### **Who do I talk to if there is a problem?**

If you are worried about anything to do with the child or his/her parents/family, you should contact the child's social worker. You will be given the social worker's name and contact telephone number and address when the child is placed with you. The social worker can be contacted during normal office hours.

If you have an urgent problem outside office hours or at the weekend, you can contact the Emergency Duty Team on telephone number 08702 402994.

## Contact us

You can contact the First Contact and Support Hub by letter, telephone or email. If you want to speak to someone in person, visit reception at Civic Centre and ask to see a social worker. If English is not your first language we can provide a translation service.

## Our opening times

We open at 8:30am every weekday we close at 5:00pm from Monday to Thursday. On Fridays we close at 4:30pm



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## About this factsheet

This factsheet provides information to a family member of friend who has agreed to care for a child who needs to be looked after by the authority. We issued this factsheet in August 2014 and updated it in November 2014. We will check the information is up to date in November 2016.



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[www.hartlepool.gov.uk/childrensfactsheets](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/childrensfactsheets)