



CHANGES TO FOSTERING HOUSEHOLD

New Partner Procedure & Guidance

THE CHILDREN'S FAMILY TRUST



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Introduction

Fostering Procedure - New Partners

Single foster carers may form new partnerships or other significant relationships and any such changes in the fostering household/circumstances need to be considered. Forming new relationships requires the investment of both energy and time and will impact on the developing relationships within the household. These will need to be reviewed to ensure that the fostering role is not adversely affected. Situations will also occur when a foster carer has a relationship break down or is bereaved and, in such situations, a new assessment should be undertaken to recognise the new situation.

For the purposes of this guidance a new partner is defined as “a significant person with whom the foster carer is having/intending/expected to develop a relationship, which is committed and serious.” If a foster carer is single at the point of their application, it should be discussed during their initial home visit and within the assessment what would happen should they form a new partnership or a significant relationship. For foster carers who experience separation, bereavement, or divorce, while fostering, a discussion regarding new relationships should be covered as part of their reassessment as a single foster carer.

As part of being an approved Foster Carer for The Children’s Family Trust (The CFT), Foster Carers are required to sign a Foster Carer Agreement made between them and ‘**The CFT**’. ***The agreement states that the CFT should be notified of any changes in relationship or changes to the fostering household. The following procedure and guidance document must be followed and Charms updated recording under Current Situation Changed.***

Approved foster carers should be made aware of the following:

- The foster carer would be expected to carry on any relationship within the context of a safer caring plan.
- The supervising social worker should be informed by the foster carer when they are in a new relationship.
- The foster carer should be aware that an assessment will be undertaken and presented to the fostering panel.

It is important that foster carers are aware that when they are embarking on a new relationship this will impact upon the household and upon any children who are being looked after. Therefore, this process will help to recognise the different stages of a relationship and allow for the relationship to develop, while also introducing the different aspects of fostering and maintaining safer care boundaries for all those connected with the fostering household.

The Local Authority will be notified of any relationship changes.

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Stage one:

Initial stages of the relationship, no contact with foster child/ren

- Foster carer to inform the supervising social worker that they are beginning a relationship. The impact of this new relationship upon the foster carer should be addressed by the supervising social worker.
- Supervising social worker recommends that the foster carer informs the new partner of her/his fostering status and that this will lead to a DBS and LA check and future assessment when there is regular contact and visits made to the foster home.
- SSW to request to meet the new partner with foster carer agreement. SSW to confirm relationship status and confirm procedure if the relationship progresses and contact is planned with foster child/ren.

Stage two:

Contact with foster child/ren, visits to the foster home.

- DBS and LA check to be undertaken when foster carer is planning regular contact that involves foster child/ren, new partner visiting the household and overnight stays. (For the purpose of the DBS check they should be treated as a member of the fostering household);
- Initial Assessment of new partner to be undertaken (see Appendix 1);
- Maximum overnights stay 3 nights this should be included in the assessment.
- A Confidentiality Statement should be signed by the new partner (see Appendix 2);
- The supervising social worker should ensure that the new partner is aware of the allegations/ complaint procedures.
- The supervising social worker reviews the Safe Caring Plan for the foster household to reflect the change in household composition.
- The child/young person's social worker or SSW should talk to the foster child/ren about the new partner to gain their understanding and views.
- The supervising social worker, in conjunction with the foster carer and the new partner, clarifies the involvement of the new partner in respect of childcare responsibilities within the household.



- The new partner can be offered the opportunity to attend the Skills to foster training, but this would not become compulsory until stage 3;
- The viability assessment and household review paperwork should be sent to Registered Manager to sign off once all the checks are completed and this should form part of the FC annual review recorded in change of circumstances and completed within 3 months of the relationship progressing to this stage.

Stage three:

New partner is planning to move into foster home.

- The new partner would be advised that they would have to be assessed to become an approved Foster Carer.

It is important to be clear that the assessment being undertaken is in relation to the new partner and not the existing Foster Carer. There is no such thing in the fostering legislation as a "re-assessment", and the existing Foster Carer will retain their fostering status until such time as they resign, or their approval is formally terminated under Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended).

- Regional Administrator to create a *new Charms file* is to be created to record all assessment work and linked to the existing Foster Carers file.
- Please ensure the Consent regarding the assessment of a new Foster Carer where they propose to foster together is signed by both the existing carer and Prospective foster carer and added to both files using Charms Progress Record, '*Consent for New Partner Assessment*'.

When undertaking an assessment of the prospective foster carer, this will need to be done in the same way as would be the case for any other prospective foster carer in terms of compliance with Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended), including all the required checks and references. It is entirely appropriate to use Form F for that purpose, and the various guidance materials (Adams, 2019; Chapman, 2019) will be relevant.

When using Form F for such an assessment, it is not appropriate to name the existing Foster Carer as an applicant, as they are not applying to foster, but are already an approved Foster Carer. However, it is important to make clear that the assessment of the new applicant is in the context of them wishing to foster alongside the existing carer as part of a couple, and this information should be set out clearly in the "pen picture" at the beginning of Form F, and throughout the assessment report. It might also be appropriate, with the agreement of the FC, for their original Form F to be made available to the fostering panel and decision-maker when they

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are considering the new fostering application.

In assessing the new prospective foster carer, it will be necessary to undertake direct sessions with them individually but will also require sessions involving the existing Foster Carer. Without this, it will be impossible to properly explore the new couple relationship, and to consider how this will impact on suitability to foster.

The new relationship may significantly change the fostering environment. This will be evident in considering how the new relationship will work for both parties, and how that will impact on their lifestyle.

If the new partner has children of their own, either with them or living elsewhere, it will be necessary to consider how they will relate to the original Foster Carer's children, if they have any, and foster children. The new carer may bring new and significant people into the existing Foster Carer's support network, and how the children will be cared for may change as the new carer brings their own approach to childcare. These issues will need careful consideration.

This means that the information from the existing approved Foster Carer will need to be included in the new assessment report, and common sense suggests that the existing Foster Carer should be part of the fostering panel process. The panel should feel able to ask questions of either or both of the couple, as this will allow them to fully explore the proposed new arrangement that will have significant implications for both members of the new couple and for any children in placement. However, it is important that the focus in the panel is on the new partner being approved, and consideration of the existing carer should not be allowed to dominate the panel discussion.

Should their assessment be positive, and the ADM approves as an approved Foster Carer for the Trust they would receive confirmation in writing and a new Foster Carer Agreement would be issued for them both to sign and return to the Trust.

- At the point of approval Regional Administrator to close the assessment file, adding the new partners information and Form F over to the original approved Foster Carer's file with the new partners approval date recorded under *current situation*.
- Once returned the new Foster Carer details would be added to the Fostering Register.

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shared with the new Applicant, and they would NOT be allowed to move into the foster home. *

At stage 2 or following attendance at Panel if it is decided that the Applicant is unsuccessful the applicant would be advised as per Fostering assessment procedures that they can appeal the fostering agencies decision if all statutory checks in Stage 1 were positive.

If the agency receives ANY unsatisfactory Stage 1 checks the Applicant would not be able to challenge the decision.

The first annual review will need to go to panel in line with 2011 Fostering Regulation 28.

The Foster Carer will need to complete the TSD's within the 12-month period from approval. The existing approved Foster Carer will need to have an annual review prior to the assessment of the new carer being completed. This will be a review of the Foster Carer as an individual and not as part of a couple and will mean that the next review will be the first panel annual review as a couple following approval of the new carer. Regional Administrator to track annual review accordingly.

**Advice and guidance would be provided to the Applicant with regards to appealing to the Panel or the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM).*

Failure to Inform 'The CFT' of a New Partner

- Supervising Social Worker to arrange to meet the carer to clarify information received about the Foster Carer commencing a new relationship and confirm the current status.
- Supervising Social Worker to explore why this information was not shared and Foster Carer reminded of the signed Foster Carer Agreement.
- New Partner procedures and guidance to be completed depending on relationship status.
- Any issues of concern to be discussed with the Registered Manager and a decision

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made if an early review is required.



Appendix 1

NEW PARTNER INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- Background Information Should cover
- Brief details of history of relationship.
- How long couple have known each other.
- Placed child's understanding of the relationship, their views and understanding of this.
- Knowledge, skills and ability to care for children and young people Should cover:
- Previous experience of caring for children, including employment, parenting or in a voluntary capacity
- Prospective carer's knowledge and understanding of the issues and situation

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affecting the children/young people currently in placement.

- Understanding of issues which have led to the child being looked after and the impact this has had on the child's physical and emotional development and behaviour.
- Do the prospective carers have any concerns worries or anxieties about being a part of a fostering family?
- New partner's lifestyle Should cover:
- Past and present employment and family other commitments.
- Accommodation – If the new partner is to stay overnight – sleeping arrangements, • Assessment of whether safer caring has been discussed and any risk factors identified and minimised as far as possible.

Current family relationships Should cover:

- Relationships within the household and within their extended family including the stability of these.
- What is the new partner's own family's view of the relationship and becoming involved in a fostering household?
- What is the child's relationship with the new partner?
- Does the new partner have any current or past history of domestic violence?
- Are there other adults within the new partner's family network who are likely to have regular contact with the child? If so, would these be positive or risky to the child.
 - Risk Factors
 - Social isolation (They need to give names of 2 personal referees)
 - Racial conflict and stereotyping (especially if child placed is of a different ethnicity to the foster carer and or the new partner)
 - Lack of emotional stability
- Understanding the looked after child/young person's birth history and relationship with birth parents Should cover:
- New partner's capacity to have potential understanding regarding to a child in care's birth family, and history.
- Capacity to safeguard the child and understanding of safeguarding issues

Capacity to work with the agency Should cover:

- Are they able to understand the need to work with the agency and other professionals/birth families?

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- New partner's understanding of the fostering role and the agency expectation of them especially regarding their role in fostering home, safer caring, and behaviour management.
- Potential requirement to attend pre-approval training, and expectations on approved carers re training and supervision.
- The requirement following to sign a confidentiality statement.

Health Should cover:

- Whether there are health issues – this includes current or past issues of physical, emotional and mental health (including stress related illnesses) and/or substance misuse.
- If so, how would this affect the new partner's suitability to be in a fostering household?
- Understanding that a full medical will be needed as part of the full assessment.

Risk Factors

- Major current or chronic and / or mental health problems
- Conviction and/or previous involvement with children's social care Should cover: Procedures and Guidance for changes within the Fostering Household.
- Whether they have any convictions or past/current involvement with the police?
- If so, how will this impact on their suitability to be in a fostering household and vulnerable children and young people.
- DBS & LA check
- Has any member of the new partner's household had any involvement with children's social care?

Risk Factors

- Offences against children or violent offences will generally rule out adults as suitable to be in a fostering household or approved as foster carers.
- Previous involvement with Children's/Social Services will need to carefully be considered.

Family History Should cover:

- New partner's relationships with own parents and siblings (Family Tree)
- Carer's childhood including strengths and difficulties for their parents/carers
- Educational achievements
- Significant life events

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Conclusion and Recommendation Should include:

- Analysis as to whether the new partner is an appropriate and safe adult to be a significant adult member of a fostering household.
- Their views and attitude regarding the fostering task and to children in care.
- Child(ren)'s wishes and feelings about the new partner if already introduced.
- Clear lists of strengths and vulnerabilities of new partner including analysis of risk factors and how they might be minimised through appropriate intervention and support.
- View of child's social worker

Appendix 2

Confidentiality Statement



- Confidentiality Statement Confidentiality relates to the duty to maintain confidence and respect privacy and it relates to information that we hold about you as well as the children and young people that are in our care.
- All information given about a child who is or who has been placed with a foster carer is confidential. This applies equally to information given as part of a written record, passed electronically, or given verbally during meetings and discussions concerning the child or family.
- Disclosure of confidential information to someone (e.g. doctor) who has a need to know of that information must be restricted to the information they need.
- Where there is doubt about a person’s need for knowledge, advice should be sought from the child’s social worker or the foster care service, before any information is disclosed.
- No matter concerning a fostered child should be discussed in a public place under any circumstances whatsoever. I agree to adhere to the above statements regarding any information that is shared with me, as a prospective foster carer, regarding any child or young person who is in care.

Name		Signed		Date	
Name		Signed		Date	
SSW		Signed		Date	
RM/PTM		Signed		Date	

Review



Appendix 3.

Guidance for completing the New Partner Form F Assessment

The existing Foster Carer's original assessment can usefully be used to provide background information on the approved Carer, but it is important that if any previous assessment information is used, it is highlighted as such in the new assessment. For example: Source - from original assessment Previous Assessor's View It must be clear what is the new information, assessment, and analysis of this significant change in circumstances.

Be wary when updating as the new partner and relationship will change not just the family dynamics but the approved carer's position and emotional availability and time for the fostering task.

Key Areas to Explore for applicant, provide information and evaluate the significance of the applicants – to determine if they are suitable to foster.

- Why do they wish to foster? Is it a case of having to be assessed to satisfy regulations to live in a fostering household?
- The relationship is a new commitment – this also requires a commitment to fostering.
- What are their expectations of fostering?
- Are they open to the required training and support available?
- Are they accepting of the fostering task?
- They are joining a family who foster- very different rules apply. Has the new partner had the opportunity to access the Fostering Standards? Can they work with them?
- Enable the prospective carers to talk without prompts, about the Child(ren) in care and their relationship with them. This should give assessors a good indication about their potential suitability as carers.
- Family of origin - including siblings and other significant family members – what do the new partner's children/extended family think/know about fostering?
- Are there children of previous relationships and if so what is the impact on them?
- Do children from previous relationships visit the home? If so what would be the sleeping arrangements?
- Seek their references/interview any adult children and analyse what they say about the new partner, their experiences of his/her parenting abilities, the capacity to parent and their thoughts about fostering – these interviews provide a rich source of



Couple Relationship

- How do they work together and is this conducive to fostering?
- How will they manage their relationship alongside fostering?
- What is their view of their relationship and how do they see this developing?
- Explore the challenges of developing their relationship alongside fostering. If either the present foster carer and/or prospective carer have previous

Ex - Partners

- Does this affect their present relationship?
- Seek references from previous partners and ask how they feel about their children being part of a fostering household.
- How do they manage contact between children and previous partners – this provides a good source of evidence about ability to work together for the benefit of the children, whether their own or children in care with birth parents.

Diversity

- Does the new partner have a different personal, class, racial and ethnic, gender, sexual, cultural, language and religious persuasion identity to the foster carer and the Child(ren) in care?
- Explore this difference and assess the new partner's attitudes to and experience of diversity. Can they embrace and uphold difference?

Safeguard Checks

- Seek references from people who know the new partner well and the approved carer and new partner as a couple. Fostering Household – who lives there now?
- What is the nature of the relationships – the family dynamics and where does the new partner fit into this?

What fostering role will they provide?

- What is the nature and quality of the children of the household's relationship with the new partner? This includes the child(ren) in care – children's wishes and feelings in relation to all prospective carers must be sought - seek their SW's views, essential if the Child(ren) in Care has been long term linked to the placement.
- Prospective carer's understanding of loss and grief – do they have an insight into the losses children in care experience?
- Have they left another set of relationships and experienced loss?
- Will these feelings be transferred into the fostering household?



Social & Support Network

- How has this developed with the new partner?
- Are there increased support/opportunities for socialising?
- Family Tree and Ecomap will have changed – show what has developed.

Extra Factors to consider Forming new relationships requires the investment of energy and time and the impact of developing relationships on a fostering household need to be reviewed to ensure that the fostering role is not adversely affected.

If the approved carer is experienced – do not make assumptions that despite the new partner hopefully being informed and guided by the existing carer, that this is enough. The existing carer's situation, emotional energy and availability will have changed. It is a time of readjustment for all living in the home and the new couple will need time to establish their new roles, routines and boundaries.

The assessing SW will need to assess

- Does the new partner have the required skills for this level?
- Can the new partner deal with the most challenging children?
- Where there are a number of children involved in the placement, we need to consider each child's needs and the additional stresses and joys this brings, alongside the new relationship.
- Are all individual needs being met?

Working relationship with the SSW – the new assessment will give the opportunity for the SSW to really get to know the new partner and to hopefully establish an open and positive working relationship.

- This is a new professional relationship for the SSW, and it should not be just informed by the existing working relationship with the approved carer. It is a separate professional relationship.
- Use as evidence of how the new partner may work in partnership.
- How does the new partner view the birth parents/relatives of the child in placement?
- Do they support any contact arrangements?
- Can they promote the birth family?

Evidence Strengths

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- What strengths does the new partner bring to the fostering task? What strengths do they bring as a couple?

Vulnerabilities

- What vulnerabilities does the new partner have in terms of fostering? What plans are in place to combat this? I.e. area for further development - identify training/support groups/buddying up etc...

Conclusion

Undertaking new partner assessments requires an informed knowledge on the assessment process and the fostering household, a clear focus on what is required and a confidence about what it is important to explore, assess and analyse. It requires a sensitive, evidence-based approach.