

### **Purpose:**

To set out the Trust's position with regard to the provision of respite for its Foster Carers.

### **Policy**

The Trust recognises that access to respite care can be a key factor in promoting placement stability both in relation to long and short term fostering. Whilst fostering can be very rewarding, equally it can be a particularly demanding and sometimes stressful occupation. Not only can it be so for Foster Carers themselves but also sometimes for the children of Foster Carers.

The Trust recognises that Foster Carers are asked to provide the experience of a 'normal family life' for the children / young people they foster and that taking respite whilst a child(ren) / young person is in placement arguably may not reflect what ordinarily happens in families. However, the Trust also recognises that Foster Carers are often caring for children / young people whose previous life experiences have been anything other than ordinary and whose resulting needs are such that their Foster Carers are required to utilise considerable personal resources in order to meet those needs. The Trust therefore accepts that there may be occasions when Foster Carers may need to take some 'time out' from fostering whilst a child(ren) / young person is in placement in order to 'recharge their batteries', so enabling them to continue with a particular placement or placements.

However, where at all possible, the Trust believes that it is preferable for Foster Carers to take respite between having a child(ren) / young person in placement, as this would avoid causing disruption to children / young people. When this is not possible, for example in relation to long term placements, then the Trust will endeavour to provide the Foster Carer with respite by providing an alternative placement for the child(ren) / young person.

Such respite will be provided by the Trust for up to a maximum of 14 nights for every 52 weeks a child / young person is in placement. This would be on a pro rata basis. For example, if a Foster Carer has had a child / young person in placement for only 6 months of the year and no other child / young person in placement for the rest of the year, then that Foster Carer would only be able to have paid respite for up to a maximum of one week.

When considering taking respite when a child(ren) / young person is in placement, a careful balance needs to be struck between why the Foster Carer needs the respite at that time and what is the general situation of the child / young person in placement. For example, if there is a significant event or change due to take place in the child's / young person's life during the time that it is proposed that respite takes place e.g. a change of school, then it would be questionable as to whether going on respite at such a time would be in the best interests of that child / young person. In such circumstances the Trust will, in consultation with the Foster Carer and the Responsible Local Authority, look to see if it would be better to support the Foster Carer in other ways during that period.

The following factors also need to be borne in mind when considering respite:

- it is important to avoid arranging respite when there is a significant event or celebration due to take place in the fostering household, so excluding a child / young person
- only in exceptional circumstances will the Trust agree to a child / young person going on respite during the school week. The Trust could not agree to respite if this meant that a child / young person could not attend school
- it is important to avoid differentiating between child(ren) / young person in the foster home by having a particular child(ren) / young person going on respite whilst another child(ren) / young person remain in the home. However, it is recognised that, especially for those Foster Carers who have children of their own, this may not always be achievable.

## Respite Policy and Guidance



- whilst respite might be needed as a consequence of a child's / young person's behaviour, it should not be presented as a punishment to the child - to do so would not only be unfair to the child / young person but also on those providing the respite
- where there is more than one child / young person in placement, and the respite is needed as a consequence of the behaviour of a particular child / young person, then it should not be assumed that every other child / young person in placement should also go on respite at that time. Consideration always needs to be given to the individual needs of each child / young person in placement.

All respite care has to be arranged through the Trust and can only be provided by individuals whom the Trust has assessed as suitable to provide respite care.

The Trust is committed to offering a variety of respite provision including by:

- recruiting Foster Carers with the specific aim of them providing respite for other Foster Carers
- assessing individuals to act as Respite Carers for specific Foster Carers. These will need to be people already known to the Foster Carer, perhaps a family friend or member of the extended family
- encouraging a team ethos amongst Foster Carers whereby Foster Carers will be open to providing respite for other Foster Carers when they are in a position to do so

If a Foster Carer wishes to take up respite whilst a child(ren) / young person is in placement, this needs to be requested at least 6 weeks in advance. The only exception to this would be in the case of an emergency. This notice is required in order to allow enough time to:

- identify appropriate provision
- consult with all concerned
- undertake introductions and exchange of information

Whilst the Trust will endeavour to make respite care available for Foster Carers, it needs to be borne in mind that this is very much dependant on appropriate provision being available.

Foster Carers are advised that making a request does not in itself guarantee that respite provision will be made available. Also, it must not be assumed that if a Foster Carer usually requests respite at a particular time of the year, that they then do not need to make a specific request for respite on each occasion they wish to take respite.

Please refer to the Foster Carer Finance Handbook with regards to respite allowances.

