

Delegating authority to foster carers –things you need to know

Effective delegation of decision making makes a huge difference in the lives of looked after children

1. Listen to what children want

The people who look after children on a daily basis are usually the ones who make day-to-day decisions such as whether to agree sleepovers and school trips. This should be no different for foster carers. Children do not want social workers making these decisions – it makes them feel different to their peers, can result in missed opportunities and gets in the way of them enjoying a full childhood and family life.

2. Involve birth families in care planning

Children's relationships with their birth families vary. Some birth families will be very involved in making decisions about their child's care, particularly where the child is likely to return home. It is essential wherever possible, and always where children are voluntarily accommodated, to involve birth families in discussions about delegating decision making to foster carers, helping them understand how beneficial this can be to the life of their child.

3. Set out clearly what decision making is delegated

Authority for day-to-day decision making should be delegated to foster carers unless there is a good reason not to. Every fostered child must have a placement plan which sets out the plan for their day-to-day care and how decisions about them will be made. This plan should include what decisions can be made by their foster carer and where decision making is not delegated to the foster carer the reasons should be clearly explained in the child's placement plan.

4. Help promote placement stability and good outcomes for children

Ensuring that foster carers are supported to make day-to-day decisions helps the children in their care to have confidence in these relationships and supports the development of trusting and secure attachments to their foster carers.

5. Work together in the best interests of the child

Effective partnership working is core to good quality foster care. Where the foster carer, supervising social worker and child's social worker are clear about how day-to-day decisions are to be made, decisions are more likely to be on time with everyone working in the best interests of the child.

6. Support foster carers to develop the skills and confidence they need

Through appropriate training and supervision, fostering services should support their Foster carers to develop the skills and confidence to take day-to-day decisions, empowering them to make these decisions within a strong framework of support.

7. Understand and support appropriate delegation of authority to foster carers

Everyone at every level should understand how authority should be delegated to foster carers. Organisations should have a clear policy on delegation of authority for decision making to foster carers that can be shared with birth parents and foster carers. It is important that social workers believe that their organisation is committed to appropriate delegation of authority and that they and foster carers will be effectively supported even when things go wrong.

8. Make a reality of the vision in the Foster Carers' Charter

The Foster Carers' Charter launched in March 2011 clearly states that that fostering services must 'Treat foster carers with openness, fairness and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child'

The Foster Carers Charter can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175444/Foster_carers_charter.pdf

Extract taken from Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol2: care planning, placement and case review (June 2015)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf