

## **Assessing a New Partner of an existing Single Foster Carer**

### **Introduction**

Single foster carers will on occasion form new partnerships and significant relationships. For the purposes of this procedure a partner means a significant person with whom the foster carer is having/intending/expected to develop a relationship, which is committed and serious.

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

It is fairly obvious for safe care reasons that an 'assessment' of the new partner is required and a discussion/decision is needed around the following issues:

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

### **When to begin an assessment**

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

There is an expectation that foster carers conduct their relationships in the manner to be discussed below.

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

Clearly, the timing of such an assessment is important although it must be recognised that the department 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 for the foster carer to be placed in, but the nature of fostering and the safe care issues involved suggest this is something the foster carer must accept. As long as it is clearly explained during the initial assessment the carer may find this acceptable. The new partner also has to accept this position

Clearly 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 4 different stages. However, it is clearly accepted that the progress of the relationship between the stages, will vary in each individual situation.

### **The 4 different stages merit different assessments.**

#### **Stage 1 Initial stages of the relationship (ie) no contact with foster child/home.**

- Foster Carer to let the fostering social worker know that they are beginning a relationship.
- Social worker to reiterate that an assessment will be needed **as/when/if** the relationship progresses.
- Social worker **recommends** that the foster carer informs the new partner of their fostering status as soon as possible and lets them know that this may lead to an assessment .

#### **Stage 2 New partner is a visitor to the foster home and has contact with foster children.**

The Foster carer must supervise contact between new partner and foster child, not leaving the foster child alone.

Within one month of the new partner visiting the foster home, the following should be completed.

- The fostering social worker should meet the new partner to explain the position re. a possible assessment
- A CRB check should be carried out.
- The child's social worker should talk to the foster child/ren about the new partner to gain their understanding and views

**Stage 3. New partner visits and stays over at the foster home when the foster children are in placement. It is assumed unsupervised contact may occur during this stage.**

- CRB check must be completed for this to occur.
- A SSIS check has to be undertaken.
- References should be requested and taken up as the relationship continues. For example telephone/written references should be considered initially. Discussion with the new partners ex-partner, and children should be considered if applicable. Partners who work with children should be aware of the allegations procedure. A reference should be obtained from their employer.
- A Confidentiality Statement should be signed by the new partner.
- Information should be given on the allegations procedure
- The fostering social worker should have a discussion with the partner re safe care issues.
- The Safe Care Plan should be updated which includes a Risk Assessment to inform partner of potential risks.
- The fostering social worker outlines and agrees the expectations on how involved the new partner will/can be in relation to the child care responsibilities.

**Stage 4. New partner moves into foster home.**

Assessment must begin with a view to panel approval as a foster carer

Part One of Form F to be completed.

Medical checks completed (& any other statutory checks not already undertaken).

Part Two brief report to be written for Panel to look at:-

- i. Childhood background of new partner
- ii. Previous relationships with significant adults.
- iii. Relationship with own and the carers children, if applicable.
- iv. Relationship with the foster carer.

- v. Relationship with foster child.
- vi. Commitment to fostering, including willingness to abide by policies and procedures
- vii. Competencies including parenting ability

The partner should attend Skills to Foster Training

The Estate Agent details should be updated