

PRACTICE GUIDANCE REGARDING SLEEPOVERS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN FOSTER AND RESIDENTIAL CARE

Principles

A 'sleep-over' is defined as an occasional, short overnight stay with a friend, probably of similar age.

Decisions need to strike a balance between promoting as 'normal' a life as possible and ensuring the safety and protection of the children in our care.

Decision making should normally be delegated to foster carers or residential care staff. Only in exceptional circumstances should the permission of senior managers be required. Judgements should be based on a reasonable assessment of the risks.

There should be an awareness that some young people, because of their history, may pose a risk to the family they are going to stay with

A Criminal Records Bureau check is intrusive and is not a statutory duty. They should not normally be undertaken.

It is important that children and young people should be consulted about their views.

It is desirable that parents should be part of the consultation process and contribute to the decision making as appropriate.

Practice

The child's care plan, formulated at the placement agreement meeting, will emphasise the delegation of decision making to the carers. Where there are exceptional circumstances, which require the permission of another person or where restrictions are placed on a child's overnight stays these will be clearly stated in the plan together with the reasons.

In all cases foster carers and residential staff should be made aware of any individuals, addresses or areas which may place a child at risk.

Decision Making

Foster carers and residential staff considering a request from a child to stay overnight with a friends or friends should base their decision on the following factors:

Are there any indications in the child's past experiences or current behaviour that would preclude overnight stays?

Are there any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed?

Is the child staying in the household with another child or children, rather than staying solely with an adult or adults?

The age and level of understanding of the child concerned

What is known about the purpose of the overnight stay?

The length of the stay

It is essential that carers ensure that they have contact details for the household in which the child is staying. They should contact the household beforehand to assist in assessing the request for an overnight stay and to confirm arrangements. They should ensure that the child and the host family have their (the carers') contact details.

In circumstances, based on the above assessment, where there is good reason to consider a child is at specific risk in staying in a particular household, the social worker should be consulted and a decision made jointly. In these cases consideration may be given to requesting a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Recording

Details of all overnight stays should be recorded by the carer(s) and noted, in summary, if appropriate, in the case file. The child's social worker should be informed in due course.

If carers are unsure about any aspect of this policy, advice can be obtained from the child's social worker or from a fostering social worker.