This Handbook aims to provide all Foster Carers with helpful guidance to carry out the fostering role
Introduction and Welcome from the Managing Director

As newly approved foster carers, can I take this opportunity to offer you a warm welcome to Clifford House Fostering and hope that this is the beginning of an exciting fostering career, where you will be rewarded by fostering a child or children who are in need of the opportunity to experience a warm and caring family.

Fostering is such an incredible job. Without carers who are prepared to give up their own time and privacy, and offer a child a home, children in care would not have the opportunity to experience positive family life, for which some children would not previously have had.

Children are our future, and as foster carers we entrust in you the responsibility of helping children in your care to grow emotionally and physically, have the opportunity to live without being exposed to violence and abuse and move, either back to their own families, on to permanent carers or to live independently with experiences and new life skills that will help them in their future to become good citizens.

This guide has been produced in conjunction with a number of separate documents, the link for which are identified within the contents of this guide, it is intended that this guide is a helpful aid in the task of fostering, but does not cover every possible event or issue and therefore links and suggestions are given at points that might help where you want to read more about the subject matter. This guide should also be read in conjunction with fostering polices produced for Clifford House which have been web enabled. The website address can be located below.

Thank you for choosing to work in partnership with Clifford House Fostering.

Best Wishes

Stephanie Clay

Managing Director

This guide can be found on our website in the carers log in area. There is also a link on the Clifford House Fostering Fostering policies.

When clicking on the links that direct you to websites hold down ctrl and click the left hand mouse button.

Feedback is always welcome and any comments about this handbook can be sent to:

Stephanie@cliffordhousefostering.com
Introduction and Background to Clifford House Fostering

Clifford House Fostering is a small independent agency which was started originally under a different name (Clifford House) in 1993. At that time the fostering service was created organically out of an arising need to support the existing residential service. During that period further development of the fostering service also coincided with an experienced foster family approaching the service to offer their skills to deliver an alternative to residential care in the form of a placement within their own home.

Since then a strong ethos of helping children and particularly teenagers to live in foster care as an alternative to residential care, with good support for foster carers and an excellent training program to manage challenging behaviour became one of the key strengths and values for Clifford House Fostering and many children who would otherwise have been looked after in residential care were able to live in foster care, with foster carers who had the right training and high levels of support.

Clifford House Fostering has a strong commitment to providing foster carers with excellent training and support. Caseloads of support workers and supervising social workers will remain low, and a strong learning culture remains key in providing foster carers with a number of tools to develop and excel in the task of fostering. Supervision is one of the tools which Clifford House Fostering commits to providing every month for foster carers, and remains an important time to offer support, guidance and training, whilst also giving time for reflection.

Clifford House Fostering will always work to ensure that carers develop the best practice when working with children and our carers receive accredited (BILD) training in the support and management of behaviour as one of the key training programs which we are proud of and aspire to continue to develop carers and staff who can work and support children who have been traumatised and exposed to abusive adult behaviours.

Clifford House Fostering believes positive relationships and positive rewards are a key contributing factor in helping children to recover and make progress and is one of the most effective ways to help achieve outstanding outcomes for children living in care and prides itself on the expectation that partners, key stakeholders, staff and carers will work together, in an open and respectful way, listen to the views of each other, and be prepared to accept that there is often more than one way of getting a positive result, and that working in partnership is key to this.......we hope this guide helps build that foundation and is one of the many tools available to support foster carers in the task of fostering.
Meet The Team

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Managing Director

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Recruitment Manager

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HR Manager

Gill Parker
Finance Manager

Nick Barnett
Senior Supervising Social Worker

Ian Taylor
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Lesley McBride
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Clifford House Fostering Fostering policies
www.proceduresonline.com/cliffordfoster/

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Department of Education - www.education.gov.uk/
Fostering Network - www.fostering.net/
BAAF - www.baaf.org.uk/
Government www.gov.uk
CAMHS - www.camh.org.uk
Talk to Frank (Drugs) - www.talktofrank.com
HM & Revenue and Customs - www.hmrc.gov.uk
National Association of Fostering Providers - www.nafp.co.uk
Smoke free action - www.smokefreeaction.org.uk
Fostering Service – The Legal Context

There is an expectation that all foster carers understand the legal framework that Clifford House Fostering works within to provide children and young people with a safe and nurturing foster home, looked after by carers who are competently assessed and approved, understand the needs of the children placed, and have access to learning and development as well as good support and advice.

Please refer to the Fostering policies where you will be able to access all legal frameworks for fostering and safeguarding children.

The following precise of some of the key legislation is offered as a sample, and should be read in conjunction with the full publications, available from the website above.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

The way in which Fostering Agencies practice, assess you as prospective foster carers and support you once approval has been given is based on guidance and the law.

There is a number of pieces of legislation which applies to fostering, the ‘National Minimum Standards’ for Fostering is the most useful guide in helping you as foster carers to understand the expectations made of you, and of Clifford House Fostering. However there are also further pieces of legislation that plays an important part in providing a framework for professionals including foster carers in the task of providing care for the most vulnerable children in our society.

The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2010 for the conduct of fostering services.

Working Together to Safeguard Children updated and distributed in March 2013 is the key piece of multi-agency statutory guidance for safeguarding children.

The revision of the Children Act 1989 in 2011 introduced a suite of volumes of regulations 1-4 which superseded the Children Act 1989 Volume 3. Volume 4 is the guidance and regulation provided for the standards required of fostering services.

Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills), independently commissioned by the government are the body of professionals who will regularly inspect fostering agencies to ensure that they are meeting the standards which are set out in the above national guidance and regulation.

Ofsted have a framework which they use to inspect fostering agencies and these documents can be accessed through Ofsted’s website and entering framework for fostering inspections.

Care Standards Act 2010

The Care Standards Act 2000 was updated in 2010, and remains the overriding framework which every Fostering Agency must comply with to remain registered. Clifford House Fostering will be monitored against all of the above guidance and legislation during periodic inspections by Ofsted.
Care Planning Regulations 2010

The Care Planning Regulations apply to the placements and reviews of all children who are looked after by the local authority. The objective of the Regulations is therefore to improve local authority practice in care planning, placement decisions and case reviewing, in order to ensure that care plans for looked after children are responsive to the full range of children’s needs and the outcomes for looked after children are improved.

Fostering Service Policies

Clifford House Fostering Fostering policies are available online.

These are the policies which the National Minimum Standards and the Regulations for Fostering expect each Fostering Agency to have and it is important that all staff and foster carers have an understanding of the policies.

This guidance has been produced to offer a helpful aid in the task of fostering and the following key Policies are available in full by accessing the website above.

Clifford House Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose is the document which every fostering agency will use to describe the service that it will provide to carers and to children placed and the core values and principles that it will work to achieve this service. Clifford House Fostering has a Statement Of Purpose which sets out its core values and ethos, explains some of the key services and support offered to you as foster carers and to children placed with us.

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed annually, and updated to reflect any changes at Clifford House Fostering.

Clicking here will direct you to the home page of the policy. The Statement of Purpose can also be accessed by contacting your supervising social worker or support worker.

Fostering Panel

As approved Foster carers you will have already experienced the process of being assessed and that assessment being presented to the Clifford House Fostering Panel for consideration.

As approved foster carers the Fostering Panel also has a duty to make recommendations about whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster carer and whether or not the terms of approval remains appropriate.

Every foster carer will go through a review each year, to talk about placements within the year, progress made, challenges faced and learning gained, identifying any training and development requirements. The first annual review following approval will take place at the fostering panel where all foster carers are expected to attend. Subsequent reviews will take place usually within the home of the foster carer and will be chaired by a manager, or social
worker at Clifford House Fostering. Every third year the foster carers review will be heard at the fostering panel.

As foster carers you will have supervision each month with your supervising social worker or support worker and they can talk to you about annual reviews and what will be required at that review.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering and related Regulations sets out what a fostering agency must do when it is operating a panel, the requirements for panel members and the information that the panel will require to be able to make a recommendation about foster carers terms of approval.

For information about the review process, please see the section on reviews

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies. (Following this link will take you to the Foster Panel section.)

**Supervision and Support**

Clifford House Fostering believes that every foster carer and member of staff should receive regular supervision and support. By adopting this model as a strength carers and staff will become outstanding advocates for children in care, be open to respectful challenge and become engaged in a learning and development culture.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the supervision and support section).

**Local Authority Policy and Procedures**

As an Independent Fostering Agency children are likely to placed with Clifford House Fostering foster carers from a number of Local Authorities.

Each Local Authority will be required by law, as Clifford House Fostering is, to develop a set of policies and procedures, Local Authorities will develop policies for safeguarding children in need of protection and for looked after children and care leavers.

The ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ March 2013 is the guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and is the guidance that covers the framework for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB’s). This guide is available on the Department of Education website

Each Local Authority will also have its own website with a set of policies which are available to the public, and each will have a policy about the authorities safeguarding board.

As an example, Clifford House Head Office is based in Herefordshire, the Local Authority has a council website which can be accessed online at www.herefordshire.gov.uk where information and children and family services can be located and also has a Local Safeguarding Board website which can be accessed online at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/hscb
Abuse (Child Protection and Safeguarding)

All children who have been accommodated into the care system will have been exposed either to the risk of significant harm, or in most cases will have experienced significant harm. There is much research available and many publications for you as foster carers to be able to gain a further understanding of what abuse is, and how this affects the behaviours of children who have been exposed to it.

The following definitions of abuse are acknowledged as the professional foundations to understanding abuse and are used in all social work and police investigations:

Sexual

Physical

Emotional

For more information visit the Department for Education website (Following this link will take you to the “working together to safeguard children” document)

The following is an abstract from the working together to safeguard children document page 85 and 86.

‘A form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or failing to prevent harm.

Physical Abuse – involves hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional Abuse – The persistent maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express his or her views, it may feature inappropriate expectations, exploitation or corruption.

Sexual Abuse – Involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities which may involve physical contact, assault by penetration (rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothes. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in a sexually inappropriate way. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.
Activities

Allowing children in foster care the opportunity to take part in everyday activities is important and Clifford House Fostering expects all foster carers to work in partnership with both the agency and the placing authority of each child to decide what the most suitable, age appropriate activities are. As foster carers we want you to be able to make decisions about activities and this process will start during assessment and continue after approval with your allocated support or supervising social worker.

It is important that children placed in foster care are able to continue, or experience the opportunity of taking part in everyday activities, such as swimming, biking, netball, or football.

As a foster carer we ask that you take the same precautions as you would for your own children, and follow law abiding rules to ensure that children are safe. Where children are riding a bike for example it is important they are given a helmet.

Where children want to take part in higher risk activities such as rock climbing, surfing, it is important that an activity risk assessment is in place, and this has been discussed and approved in the first instance by your supervising social worker or support worker, or where there is not time, that the team manager at Clifford House Fostering has given approval, and then approval must be sought form the child’s social worker. These types of activities should be discussed well in advance to avoid the unnecessary circumstance of the child in placement being left unable to take part.

At the beginning of each placement you should take the time to talk about activities and what you do as a family. It is important that consent is given and where possible the placement plan covers this matter, and gives consent to the foster carer to make decisions that are considered ‘every day activities’. We believe that ‘Delegated Authority’ should cover this (please see Delegated Authority section).

Advocacy

For Foster Carers

Clifford House Fostering is committed to funding your membership as Foster carers with the nationally recognised ‘Fostering Network’ independent organisation who is dedicated to offering support in the task of fostering. The Advice and Mediation worker is available to all foster carers with any problem or query. He or she may be able to help with relatively minor issues, and will be particularly useful and supportive to carers where an allegation of abuse has been made.

For further information please visit the Fostering Network website.
For Children

Once children have been accommodated and placed in care there are a number of ways in which a child can seek independent advocacy, and as foster carers it is important that you are able to advocate for them if asked. Most, if not all Local Authorities where the children have been placed from will have their own ‘Advocacy and Medication service’ and ‘Independent Visitors service’ for children who are looking for independent support outside that offered by their own social worker.

Each child should also have access to a children and young person’s guide when they are placed at Clifford House Fostering which will have numbers that they can ring independently to seek support.

For more information about advocacy for children please speak to your supervising social worker or support worker

Adoption (Permanence Planning and Moving on to Adoption)

Once a Placement Order has been granted by the court, the child’s social worker can look to place the child with adoptive parents, at this point the social worker should explain that the child will not be remaining in placement in the longer term and will move once permanent carers have been identified. The court process to seek a Placement Order has been under the spot light in recent months and the Adoption Action Plan launched by the government has highlighted the need for children who are accommodated into care, where it is unlikely that they will return home to birth parents, that a plan for adoption should be considered at the earliest opportunity.

As foster carers this process can be confusing, and sometimes lengthy and complicated in relation to how Parental Responsibility works, what the plan for the child is, the court process, and the possible outcomes. It is important that when a child is placed the placement plan explains the child’s legal status and the plan for the placement.

There are two websites which can offer more helpful information about this:

BAAF

Fostering Network
After Care/Care Leavers (Moving Towards Independence)

Once a child in care reaches the age of 16 if they have been in care for a period of more than 13 weeks directly prior to their 16th birthday they are entitled, as set out in the Care Leavers Legislation ‘planning transition to adulthood’ to a care leavers service up to their 25th birthday.

The type of service which they are entitled to will depend on the placing Local Authority. If the young person in placement reaches the age of 15, it is advisable to ask for the Local Authorities policy on care leavers, what service the young person in placement is likely to receive, and is there a ‘staying put policy’ which states what support is available for the young person when they reach the age of 18.

Each young person should be allocated a Personal Advisor, which the social worker for the young person can talk to about in the young person’s reviews as the young person’s age approaches 16, it is important that as foster carers you are able to ask what support is available and establish what the plan for transition is.

There are two websites which can offer further reading on the above

www.leavingcare.org – ncas website and organisation which works directly to support Care Leavers
www.DFE.co.uk - Department for Education reading material ‘transition to adulthood’ and ‘Care Leavers Regulations’ 2010

Alcohol and Substance Misuse

At Clifford House Fostering we believe that children should be educated about the risks of excessive alcohol consumptions, and families should be allowed to have an alcohol drink appropriate to the occasion and as foster carers always mindful of the responsibilities of the task of fostering.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the alcohol, drugs and solvents section) where guidance is offered about the alcohol consumption by children and foster carers

As foster carers:

As foster carers Clifford House Fostering expects you and any visitors not to consume alcohol in the presence of children, except on special occasions, and then the amount consumed should be reasonable.

Once children have gone to bed or are visiting their parents, carers and visitors may consume alcohol but should always be in a position to respond to emergencies, which may mean that one carer should abstain.

As a guide, you should be mindful of the consequences of drinking prior to looking after a child or young person. Work, performance and the ability to drive can be
affected the day after drinking. Similarly, the after effects of drinking could be bad breath, shaking, excessive thirst, indigestion, headache, etc. This may be apparent to children or young people and have serious effects on your ability to perform the fostering duties in a professional manner.

**Children:**

Under no circumstances may children consume alcohol without the approval, in writing, of the social worker and if appropriate the child's parents and then only on special occasions, such as Christmas lunch.

Where it becomes evident as carers you suspect that a child or young person has indulged in alcohol, a range of responses are relevant given variations in the severity and extent of the abuse. These options are outlined below:

- Offering fluids - water, squash.
- Periodic monitoring and checks - 10 minutes, 30 minutes, hourly, etc.
- Contacting health professionals for advice i.e. contact G.P in normal office hours, or a NHS helpline out of hours

You should never simply ignore a child or young person who appears drunk or under the influence of another substance.

In England and Wales, licensing is governed by the Licensing Act 2003; In Scotland the primary legislation is the Licensing Scotland Act 1976. (However, despite what it says legally, some Placing Local Authorities/parents may have different views).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>The law in England, Scotland and Wales</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5</td>
<td>It is illegal to give an alcoholic drink to a child under 5 except in certain circumstances (e.g. under medical supervision).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 14</td>
<td>A young person under 14 cannot go into a licensed premises unless they have a 'children's certificate'. If it does not have one the child/young person can only go into parts of licensed premises where alcohol is either sold but not drunk (e.g. an off-licence or a sales point away from a pub), or drunk but not sold (e.g. a garden or family room).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 or 15</td>
<td>14 and 15 year olds can go anywhere in a pub, but they cannot drink alcohol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or 17</td>
<td>16 and 17 year olds can buy (or be bought) beer or cider (and wine in Scotland) as an accompaniment to a meal, but not in a bar (i.e. only in an area specifically set aside for meals).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>Except for 16 or 17 year olds having a meal, it is against the law for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol in a pub, off-licence, supermarket or other outlet; or for anyone else to buy alcohol in a pub for someone who is under 18.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allegations Against Foster Carers (Managing and Dealing With Allegations)

Support for you as foster carers when an allegation is made is available, and Clifford House Fostering is committed to ensuring you are able to access this as soon as an allegation is made.

Having a false allegation made against you as a foster carer is one of the most difficult set of circumstances which will test and challenge whether you might want to continue fostering. Whilst there maybe carers who have been fostering for many years and not had an allegation against them made, it is important that there is a level of understanding this is possible, and the experience is a difficult one.

Children are accommodated into care for a range of different reasons, amongst which some are so damaged that they are unable to distinguish between their world previously, and the care they are receiving from foster carers, for all sorts of different reason’s children may say things that are not true, and they are likely to be able to comprehend why they have done this.

This said, there has been, and there will continue to be adults who become foster carers, who go on to abuse children in their care, and as a result of these experiences, national policy has been developed and is drawn from the experiences of abuse that children have been exposed too. Protecting children from harm is the most important role in fostering, and having already been exposed to harm (children in care will have been exposed to a form of harm for them to be placed in care) it is difficult to comprehend that those children are exposed again. The policy and procedure around allegations against foster carers is therefore underpinned by the ethos of minimising further abuse and can result in some upsetting, and distressing events as foster carers.

The procedures for an allegation being made against a foster carer is a national one, and can be viewed within the ‘Working Together To Safeguard Children’ March 2013. This document sets out child protection procedures.

Each Local Authority has a ‘Local Authority Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) who is responsible for issuing the policy and guidance for each area, and this can be found in each area by searching for the safeguarding website for x Local Authority.

Training will be provided for each foster carer during training, and will be a theme in all fostering tasks, and on-going relevant training.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the allegations against foster carers section).
Appropriate Adult

There are some young people in foster care who will present offending behaviour, and police will become involved. This will sometimes lead to the young person being arrested and in these circumstances it is important that as carers you use the following procedures:

- If a young person is arrested and interviewed it is critical that the young person has an 'appropriate adult' in the interview (where the young person is under the age of 17).
- A solicitor should also be instructed to act on behalf of the young person and the interview should not go ahead without one present.
- As foster carers for the young person, this should be recorded and reported to your supervising social worker, or in their absence a manager, and out of hours, the identified on-call person.

Useful information about the role of the appropriate adult can be found:


The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the appropriate adult guidance section).

Approval

Approval of you as foster carers is made by the Agency Decision Maker for the agency. The recommendation for approval is made by a qualified social worker either through the Form F assessment process as prospective foster carers or as approved fosters carers going through an annual review, which forms part of the on-going review and monitoring of your development as foster carers.

Annual reviews will consider your approval and discuss with you any recommendations about changes to your approval.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the assessment and approval which will give you details of approval, exemptions and reviews).

B

Babysitting, Day Care and Sleep Overs

If you have any concerns about babysitting, day care or sleep overs, or there is a change which you are not sure about please contact your allocated supervising social worker or support worker, or in their absence another manager.
It is important that the Placement Plan becomes the place, and then the reviews of that plan every 6 months at the child’s Looked After Children’s Review where decisions are agreed about the circumstances which allows you as the foster carer to make decisions about where the child can stay without being required to seek permission from the placing Local Authority.

This ethos is in line with Clifford House adopting the Foster Carer Charter, and allowing foster carers to be able to make day to day decisions about the child’s care, and give the child every opportunity to live as ordinary family life as possible within the circumstances of the child being in care.

This will include the parameters within which visits or stays away from the foster home may be agreed by the foster carer without prior consultation with the child’s social worker, and whether before giving agreement to such visits the foster carer is required to obtain parental consent.

The circumstances in which these situations may arise include the following:

A. Sleepovers with friends;
B. Invitations to go out for the day with a friend's family where the family are unlikely to be back until late;
C. Invitations to join a friend's family who are going away for a weekend;
D. The foster carer's own children going to a relative or friend for up to 4 days and the child wishing to go as well;
E. A relative or friend of the foster family occasionally acting as baby-sitter where the usual arrangements have broken down or are not available;
F. School trips of up to 4 days away;
G. A child's authorised day visit with a friend or family being extended if the child cannot return due to bad weather or a car breaking down where there are no known restrictions to an overnight stay taking place.

It is important that, unless there is a specific reason why contacts or overnight stays should not take place (for example the child has harmed other children and they may still pose a risk) looked after children should be given the same permission to take part in normal and acceptable age appropriate activities, such as staying over with friends, as any child would.

Where there are exceptional reasons to require foster carers to seek the permission of the child’s social worker, a manager or a parent, or place specific restrictions on permitting a child to stay overnight with friends, this should be because of reasons necessary to safeguard the child’s welfare. If there is such a reason, the required arrangements should then be appropriately recorded, completed friends and family risk assessment, including whether there is a need for DBS checks on the people involved in the contact, and these should be explained to the child.

Foster carers considering a request from a child to stay overnight with a friend should base their decision on the following factors:

A. Are there any relevant restrictions in the child's Placement Plan?
B. Are there any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour to preclude overnight stays?

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

D. Is the child staying with another child or children, rather than staying solely with an adult?
E. The age and level of understanding of the child;
F. What is the purpose and length of the overnight stay?
G. Whose idea was the overnight stay?
H. How well is the friend or family known to the child?

The arrangements for supervising or caring for the child must not compromise the safety of the child or of anyone else; and the following considerations should apply:

A. Have the arrangements been confirmed with the parent of the friend or the adult who will have responsibility during the visit?
B. What are the arrangements for the child returning to the home?
C. Is there a contact number for the household in which the child will stay?
D. Is the child aware of what to do if he or she wants to return to the home earlier than planned?
E. Does the child have a contact number for the carers where they can be reached at any time?
F. Does the child have access to a mobile phone?

In all cases, discussions should be held with the child, dependent on his or her age, as to what, if any, information should be shared with other adults to enable them to look after the child appropriately. This might include:

- Any specific health care needs of the child;
- Any established routines for the child.

Even if it has been agreed that the social worker does not have to be consulted in making these arrangements, you must inform your supervising social worker or support worker and the child's social worker must still be informed as soon as practicable afterwards and the social worker should inform the parents as appropriate.

Whenever you as foster carers and/or the fostering agency's staff are concerned about a child's reaction to contact with relatives and friends, this will be communicated to the child's social worker, the discussion will be recorded and the need to review the arrangements will be considered.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the overnight stays section).
Birth Certificates

There are often circumstances where children in the care of the Local Authority does not have a Birth Certificate. This becomes an issue when as foster carers you decide you would like to travel outside of the UK and take the child in placement with them.

If this is part of the fostering families holiday arrangement it is important to raise this at the earliest opportunity in order that a Birth Certificate can be applied for at the local Registrar Office where the child was born.

Birthdays

Any special occasion can trigger a mixture of emotional responses from a child who has been placed in foster care. As foster carers it is important to recognise efforts to make a birthday 'special' may be sabotaged by a distressed child who really wants to spend their day with their birth family and that this behaviour requires understanding and patience.

As foster carers you receive an allowance to contribute towards a gift for children placed in their care. Birthdays are an opportunity to offer a positive experience and foster carers are asked to take photos (once approval from the child, age appropriate is given that this is ok) as part of the memory boxes/life story work whilst children are in placement.

There may be occasions where you are asked to involve the birth family within birthday celebrations, and it may be appropriate to have more than one gathering to celebrate a birthday. The complexity of this should be discussed with your supervising social worker or support worker.

Breakdown of Placements/Unplanned Endings and Making Placements Work

At Clifford House Fostering we understand that the children and young people who enter our service and your homes have struggled to cope with experiences of separation, loss and rejection from their own birth families.

The fractures in key relationships can often lead to high anxiety, mistrust and a fear of future connections. Our collective aim is to provide a family experience that develops a sense of security, belonging, predictability and sustainability. It is within these environments that new and positive attachments are formed and that assist children to recover and develop a confidence in future relationships.

This can be emotionally challenging work that presents difficult behaviour and requires time, patience and support. It is really important that foster cares do not 'give up' when a child becomes difficult to support and that they have the optimum opportunity to feel accepted, safe and secure.

Any ending of a placement must be considered, planned and every effort made to support a child to leave as positively as can be achieved.
There are many forms of support available to you at Clifford House Fostering and the ethos is very much of a team approach. The ratio of qualified supervising social workers to foster carers is one key determinant and embedded in a philosophy of securing and supporting placement stability.

Direct supervision and support (throughout day and night) is part our commitment to working alongside you in preventing placement breakdown.

Clifford House Fostering offers a suite of training, learning and development to assist you in beginning to make sense of and supporting a child's past, powerful emotions and difficult behaviours.

Individualised support planning to you and the child is always available which can focus on understanding challenges, developing practical strategies and a chance to explore how we feel.

The opportunity to meet with other carers and share experiences, ideas and frustrations through carer forums is also an invaluable source of support.

At Clifford House we are committed to developing links and opportunities for support, advice and mentoring from experienced carers. This can be achieved in lots of ways, telephone, meeting up, forums and is a rich source of assistance.

**British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)**

BAAF is a nationally recognised organisation who offers training, support and resources to professionals working in the field of fostering and adoption. BAAF can also offer support and advice to foster carers who are interested in fostering, are approved and would like to seek some independent advice and support.

**Bullying (The Challenge of Bullying)**

Bullying is not acceptable, and will not be tolerated at Clifford House Fostering, either by an adult or a child who is involved with the agency. Clifford House Fostering expects employees, carers, children, colleagues and partners to behave respectfully towards each other and challenge differences in an open and honest way. Open and respectful challenge contributes considerably to learning, a culture which Clifford House Fostering supports and works too.

There is a complaints process for staff and carers to follow in the event that foster carers or staff are not happy about a particular aspect of support or service received. Please refer to the link above and the section on complaints for further information and the procedure to follow if you have a complaint to make.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the anti-bullying section).
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

CAMHS is a service provided for all children and young people in need of specific support for a range of diagnosed disorders or behavioural issues.

The range of related disorders include: anxiety, autism, behavioural problems, bullying, depression, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, psychotic disorders, and substance abuse. This list is not exhaustive and each Local Authority will have a local CAMHS service available for consultation on the service that they have available to children in care.

If concerns are raised about any child living in foster care it is important that support is available to both the child and to you as the foster carer. Children in Care and their wellbeing is a corporate responsibility for each Local Authority and therefore specific support from CAMHS should be made available if it is requested by a G.P or by the child’s social worker. The placement plan and reviews at the child's Looked After Children’s Review should consider any concerns and the support required or where there is a delay in the service being provided.

Car Seats and Car Guidance

Clifford House Fostering expect staff and foster carers to use the codes set out by the government and produced in highway code and the Fostering policies.

Car Safety

Clifford House Fostering expects staff and carers to take all advisory and necessary precautions to ensure that driving is safe and within the legal limits. This relates to the mechanics of the car and having in place the appropriate license and insurance, and in the measures taken to ensure children are safely secured whilst being transported and that driving itself is safely undertaken, and complies with the Highway Code and speed limits.

All staff and carers must take responsibility as the owner of a vehicle, or the driver of a vehicle that the correct license, insurance, tax and MOT certificates are in place and valid. An annual check of carers certificates will be made during the foster carer review process to validate these documents.

Any penalties that are issues to a carer should be communicated to the supervising social worker or support worker and the registered manager, and the insurance company should be notified.
Any accidents where children in placement have been involved should be communicated at the soonest opportunity and a written report provided to the supervising social worker or support worker. Where medical treatment has been necessary this should be communicated immediately (or as soon after the accident when it is practical to do so) to the supervising social worker or support worker and the decision made about who will notify the child’s social worker and where required and appropriate the child’s family.

As foster carers there will be a requirement to take children in placement to meetings/visits to see professionals or family members from time to time. These circumstances can and do lead to children becoming upset and caution should be applied where a journey in the car is being made when this occurs.

If a journey is due to be made and the child is very upset or where behaviour is unsettled it will depend on the relationship and understanding of behaviour to determine whether the journey should go ahead, however, it is safer to be late for an appointment, and caution should always be applied when considering a journey in the car with an unsettled child.

If car journeys are of particular concern and an on-going issue this should be raised with your supervising social worker or support worker and a risk assessment undertaken, and discussed with all involved in the child’s care.

Experience tells us that 1-1 time in the car can also be a good opportunity for children to share their feelings, a time when they are not exposed to having direct eye contact, or someone facing them directly, for some children this can encourage a dialogue, and some positive conversations can come from a journey in the car.

The Following extract is taken directly from the website called child car seats.

Cars

The law requires all children travelling in cars to use the correct child restraint until they are either 135 cm in height or the age of 12 (which ever they reach first). After this they must use an adult seat belt. There are very few exceptions, and the main ones are set out below.

It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that children under the age of 14 years are restrained correctly in accordance with the law.
Children up to 3 years old

In the Front Seat

The child **MUST** use the correct child restraint.

It is illegal to carry a child in a rear-facing child seat in the front, which is protected by an active frontal airbag.

In the Rear Seat

The child **MUST** use the correct child restraint.

In a licensed taxi or licensed hire car, if a child restraint is not available then the child may travel unrestrained in the rear. This is the only exception for children under 3, and has been introduced for practical rather than safety reasons. You should always think about ways to make sure that a child seat is available.

It is the driver's legal responsibility to ensure that the child is correctly restrained.

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Children aged 3 and above, until they reach EITHER their 12th birthday OR 135cm in height

In the Front Seat

The child **MUST** use the correct child restraint.

In the Rear Seat

The child **MUST** use the correct restraint, where seat belts are fitted.

There are three exceptions where there is not a child seat available. In each case the child **MUST** use the adult belt instead. They are -

1) in a licensed taxi or private hire vehicle;

2) if the child is travelling on a short distance for reason of unexpected necessity;

3) if there are two occupied child restraints in the rear which prevent the fitment of a third.

In addition, a child 3 and over may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a vehicle if seat belts are not available.
It is the driver's legal responsibility to ensure that the child is correctly restrained.

http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/ - top

Children over 1.35 metres in height, or who are 12 or 13 years old

In the Front Seat

The adult seat belt MUST be worn if available.

In the Rear Seat

The adult seat belt MUST be worn if available.

It is the driver's legal responsibility to ensure that the child is correctly restrained.

http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/ - content

Passengers Over 14 years old

When travelling in the front or rear seat, an adult seat belt MUST be worn if available.

It is the responsibility of the individual passenger to ensure that they are wearing the seat belt.

Other Vehicles (vans, buses, coaches, minibuses and goods vehicles)

http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/ - content

Other Vehicles - Front Seats

The law requires children (and adults) travelling in the front of all vehicles, including vans, buses, coaches, minibuses and goods vehicles to use an appropriate child restraint or adult seat belts.

http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/ - content

Other Vehicles - Rear Seats

Rear Seats in Small Minibuses

Passengers sitting in the rear of minibuses that have an unladen weight of 2,540 kg or less must wear the seat belts that are provided. It is the driver’s responsibility to ensure that:

- children under 3 years of age use an appropriate child restraint if available.
- children aged between 3 and 11 years, under 1.35 metres tall use an appropriate child restraint if available, or if not available, wear the seat belt, if available.
- children aged 12 and 13 years (and younger children who are 1.35 metres or taller) use the seat belt, if available.

Passengers over the age of 14 years in smaller minibuses are legally responsible for wearing a seat belt themselves.

**Rear Seats in Larger Minibuses**

Passengers over the age of 14 MUST wear seat belts in the rear of larger minibuses (over 2,540 kg unladen weight). However, all passengers are strongly advised to wear seat belts or the correct child seat on all journeys.

**Rear Seats in Coaches**

Passengers over the age of 14 MUST wear seat belts in the rear coaches. However, all passengers are strongly advised to wear seat belts or the correct child seat on all journeys.

[http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/](http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/) - Content

**Summary of the Seat Belt Laws for Cars, Taxis and Private Hire Cars**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is responsible?</th>
<th>Front seat</th>
<th>Rear seat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driver</strong></td>
<td>Seat belt <strong>MUST</strong> be worn if available.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children under 3 years old</strong></td>
<td>Correct child restraint <strong>MUST</strong> be used.</td>
<td>Correct child restraint <strong>MUST</strong> be used. If one is not available in a taxi, then the child may travel unrestrained in the rear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Children aged 3 and above, until they reach EITHER their 12th birthday OR 135cm in height** | Correct child restraint **MUST** be used | Where seat belts fitted, correct child restraint **MUST** be used  
**MUST** use adult belt if the correct child restraint is not available in three scenarios:  
- in a in a licensed taxi or private hire vehicle;  
- for a short distance for reason of unexpected necessity;  
- two occupied child restraints prevent fitment of a third. | Driver |
In addition, a child 3 and over may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a vehicle if seat belts are not available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child over 1.35 metres, or 12 to 13 years</th>
<th>Seat belt MUST be worn if available</th>
<th>Seat belt MUST be worn if available</th>
<th>Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult passengers (ie 14 years and over)</td>
<td>Seat belt MUST be worn if available</td>
<td>Seat belt MUST be worn if available</td>
<td>Passenger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.childcarseats.org.uk/law/ - content More Passengers than Seat Belts

The safest option is to only carry the same number of passengers as there are seat belts. If necessary, use two cars or make two journeys for the trip.

Children must still use a child car seat until they are either 135cm tall or 12 years old so that they meet the law, as described above. There is no exception from this law if a vehicle has more passengers than seat belts.

Some adult passengers may legally travel in the rear of the vehicle without wearing a seat belt. This may be legal, but it is not safe.

Carer Profiles

During the process of being assessed for suitability to become foster carers there will be a request made for each fostering family to develop a foster carer profile. The profile is usually a picture leaflet describing the family, where they live, any pets, the room that is available for the child being considered for placement.

The importance of a profile is to give the opportunity to Local Authorities to share with children the profiles, and ‘de-mystify’ what the fostering family might look like, with the intention of helping a scared, and vulnerable child feel a little re-assured.

It is important that profiles are kept up to date and are available to share.

CHARMS

CHARMS is an electronic system designed for fostering agencies and has been developed to collate and store all of the case information about each child and foster carers working with and placed with Clifford House Fostering.

Clifford House Fostering are currently reviewing this system and will have aspirations that there will be a progressive plan and will expect all carers to use CHARMS to record all relevant progress and information about each child placed.
Children’s Guide (Welcome book)

**Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering**

The ‘Children’s Guide’ is a document which sets out how children can seek support, and what being fostered means.

As foster carers Clifford House Fostering expects that when a child is placed they have access to a children's guide and you explain to them how they can access independent advice and advocacy.

The following extract is taken from the National Minimum Standards for Fostering, which can be accessed in full by accessing the above website address

Subject to the child’s age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children’s Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children’s Guide in a way that is accessible.

16.4) The Children’s Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate.

**Child Protection Procedures**

Every Local Authority will have appointed a Local Safeguarding Children’s Board to manage and coordinate Child Protection Procedures in that area. Child Protection Procedures will describe what action needs to be taken where there is an allegation of abuse, or where an act of abuse has taken place that has exposed a child to the risk of or actual significant harm.

‘Working Together to Safeguarding Children’ is the overriding guidance that sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and how practitioners should conduct the assessment of children.

Clifford House Fostering aims to provide support to children in placement and support to foster carers to ensure that being safe is always at the core of any decision made in the planning around the care of each child placed.

Each carer will be expected to have a safe care policy which is reviewed after each child is placed, and individualised to that child. The template for the safe care policy can be accessed by contacting the administration team, or by talking to your supervising social worker or support worker.
Any concerns about the welfare of a child should always be shared with your allocated supervising social worker or support worker, and in their absence a manager. Guidance and advice can then be given about what action will need to be taken.

Training in safeguarding children in provided both during the assessment process and after as part of carers on-going professional development.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the child protection section)

Child Staying For a Holiday with a Friend or Family Member of the Foster Carer

Delegated Authority (see section on Delegated Authority) is unique to each child placed in foster care, but is essential in allowing children in care the opportunity to live in foster care and experience the same opportunities as any other child would if they were not in care, appreciating there may be some difficulties and challenges around this.

There will be times when as foster carers you would like the chance to take part in an adult activity or take a weekend away with a partner/close friend.

Clifford House Fostering would encourage and support foster carers to develop a positive support network with friends and family who can step in and support in an emergency, but may also be prepared to offer support where carers would like to take a short break away or a holiday. Please see section on ‘over night stays’ up to 4 days for relevant information and guidance.

The Placement Plan and Looked After Children’s review should agree support networks as part of the fostering family which adopts the concept of Delegated Authority.

There will be occasions where this is not straight forward, and permission for staying away from foster carers is required by the placing Local Authority, care proceedings is an example of where this can be problematic, and where birth parents retain Parental Responsibility, but this is challenged in a court of law by the Local Authority and in the process consent for a child to stay away from the foster carers is problematic.

Where you have as foster carers identified a member of the support network to take care of a child in placement for more than 4 days a ‘family and friends risk assessment’ must be completed. (This template can be accessed through the administration team.)

This process will include carrying out relevant checks of the individuals who will be taking on the primary caring role.
Children Missing From Care

Please take the time to access the area Local Authority Safeguarding Children’s Board that the child you are caring for is placed from for more information.

If a child has left the placement without permission or is missing, you must contact your supervising social worker or Support Worker or in their absence a Manager, unless there is an immediate serious risk to the child or others, in which case, you should contact the Police first.

Your supervising social worker or support worker, or in their absence a manager will come to a decision about the actions that should be taken, depending on the level of risk to the child.

The following checklist will be helpful for you as carers to start to think about the level of risk to the child in your care and what action should be taken, the first seven questions, are designed as probing questions to determine the level of risk.

1) Is this event significantly out of character?
2) Is the child likely to be subjected to harm or a crime?
3) Is the child a danger to themselves or others?
4) Is the child likely to attempt suicide?
5) Is the child a victim of abuse?
6) Does the child have any specific medical needs?
7) Is there a specific concern?
8) Do you know the child’s whereabouts?
9) Have they done this before?
10) Have you been in contact with the child?
11) Who are they with?
12) Do you believe them to be involved in crime?
13) What were their intended actions when last seen?
14) What have you done to locate the child?
15) Is there a time you expect them to return?
16) Is there any other significant information you can give?

The above checklist should help you to understand the level of risk as described below.

Low-Level Concern: If there is a Low-Level of Concern, there is no requirement to notify the Police, social worker or parents immediately. The situation should be reviewed after 6 hours or as circumstances change. If the child remains absent after 6 hours, s/he automatically transfers to the Medium-Level category.
**Medium-Level Concern:** If there is a Medium-Level of Concern, the Police, social worker and parents may be consulted or verbally notified, for information, but there is no requirement to notify them formally. If the Police or social worker are consulted or verbally notified, this must be recorded.

The level of concern should then be reviewed every two hours by your supervising social worker, support worker or in their absence a Manager, or as circumstances change.

If a missing child remains in the Medium-Level Category for a total of 6 hours s/he automatically falls into the High-Level category and the Police and social worker must be formally notified.

Where a child remains missing, the Police and social worker must be consulted every six hours to determine whether to up or down grade the level of concern. This notification/consultation must be recorded. Such a child should only be notified formally to the Police/social worker if it is determined that the level of concern is High; though this does not prevent strategies from being adopted, with the Police and social worker, to return the child to his/her placement if possible.

**High-Level Concern:** If there is a High-Level of Concern, the Police in the area where the child became absent must be formally notified immediately.

The social worker must be notified as soon as practicable. The social worker should decide whether to notify the parent(s) and, if so, who should do so.

When notifying or consulting the Police and social worker an explanation should be provided of the circumstances leading to the absence and that there is a High-Level of Concern about the child - as well as an explanation of those concerns. All notifications and consultations must be recorded.

Children who go missing will be helped to have a meeting, in private with their social worker.

Where a child goes missing for long periods of time or very regularly, the child, their social worker, your supervising social worker, and your family will meet to decide what action should be taken to help and protect the child.

As foster carers you should be familiar with the Runaway and Missing from Home Protocol for the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) area in which they live. Clifford House Fostering is committed to working within the parameters of these protocols. The LCSB can be easily accessed by searching for Local Authority xxxxxx (E.G. if you live in Staffordshire you would search Staffordshire LCSB safeguarding procedures)

Finally, when a child does go missing this is described in the Fostering Regulations as a ‘Notifiable Event’ and by law this requires Clifford House Fostering to monitor and review all incidents of this nature. It is therefore a requirement that you must inform your supervising social worker or support worker in the event that the child in your care leaves without permission.
The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the missing child care section)

Complaints Made by Foster Carers

Clifford House Fostering would always encourage you as carers to talk to your allocated supervising social worker or support worker if you are unhappy about the service you are receiving either from Clifford House Fostering or regarding any involvement of another professional. Whilst it is sometimes difficult to talk openly to someone about their practice, this is usually the most productive method of finding a satisfactory resolution and underpins the culture of working together positively with every professional in a respectful, open and transparent way, which Clifford House Fostering believes is key to success in working with carers, partners and children.

There are three stages to the Clifford House complaints procedure and these are as follows:

The agency is committed to resolving conflicts and concerns at an early stage (Stage One) wherever possible.

The agency will ensure that complainants are kept informed of the progress of their complaint. In the event that any complainant is not satisfied at any stage, they may and should avail themselves of the right to make a complaint to the Regulatory Authority.

All complaints should be made in the first instance to the Manager, except where he/she is the subject of a complaint, in which case it must be made to the Managing Director. In the event the complaint is about the Managing Director the complaint can be addressed to the HR Manager who will ensure the complaint is managed appropriately.

Stage One

Complaints are often about the support or service that has been received. In this circumstance the supervising social worker or support worker (unless the complaint is about them, in which case you should proceed straight to stage 2) will look to mediate between the complainant and the individual whom is being complained about if this is appropriate. Where this is not appropriate the supervising social worker or support worker will visit the complainant to seek resolution.

Part of this discussion may cover whether it would be more appropriate for the complaint to be directed to the local authority with responsibility for the child's placement, and dealt with under the local authority’s complaints procedure.

A letter of resolution or outcome will be issued in response to informal complaints by the manager.

Stage Two

This stage will be activated generally if the complainant is not completely satisfied with the outcome of Stage One. The complainant will be advised that they must put their complaint
in writing to the registered manager of the company. The registered manager will then contact the complainant within 5 working days to advise that he/she has instructed an Investigating Officer (independent of the direct support network in place to the complainant) to deal with the complaint, providing the name of the investigating officer, and the expected time-frame for the investigation.

A report will be completed following the investigation, detailing how the matter was investigated, by whom and what outcome was reached. It will also set out or provide the evidence to support the report's conclusions.

**Stage Three**

This is the final stage of the complaints process. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage Two investigation, they must confirm this in writing, including reasons for their dissatisfaction, to the managing director of the company, who will undertake to arrange for the case to be reviewed by an independent panel within 28 days.

The panel will be made up of:

- A member of the board of directors
- A manager or staff member of the service
- A chairperson, if none of the above can fill that role

In any event no person implicated in a complaint, or a relative or close associate of anyone implicated, may sit on the panel or be involved in carrying out any investigation. The panel will be constituted in such a way as to afford true independent appraisal of the complaint.

The panel will consider the documentation relating to the complaint, and any further written representations that the complainant wishes to make. The panel will reach a decision and the complainant will be advised of the outcome in report form (to include any actions in order to resolve the situation) within 7 days.

Should the complainant still not be satisfied with the outcome of Stage Three, they may take advice from the Regulatory Authority.

**The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the complaints procedure section)**

**Computers in the Foster Home (e-safety)**

Carers should be aware of potential dangers when children use the internet. It is important that controls and restriction are regularly checked and children are guided and educated about the risks of chat rooms. Where possible computers should be in communal rooms, and children’s use should be monitored, whilst acknowledging this should be proportionate to age, and concerns and contacts. Children should always be advised about never
arranging to meet a stranger through the internet and about the use of ‘Nicknames’ and exaggerating about age.

Clifford House Fostering would expect foster carers to support children in placement to access a computer within the foster home for education purposes, and to completed homework.

As foster carers Clifford House Fostering would not expect any confidential information to be stored on a computer where it can be accessed by a child. Security settings should be used and information stored securely.

E-Safety resources can be found through the following websites

www.chidnet.com

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

**Confidentiality**

Working with children in care will always include hearing, and taking part in discussing and being responsible for information which is extremely delicate and sensitive. Foster carers and staff will receive lots of information about the child that is being considered as a potential match.

It is appreciated that there will be a need to share with a partner or very close friend some information about the child, however caution is advised and if there is a need for you to share information in the event of someone else caring for the child in the placement permission should be sought from the supervising social worker or support worker.

Clifford House Fostering supports the need for you as Foster Carers to be able to share upsetting information about a child’s circumstances and advises that sharing this only with a partner and in supervision is the most appropriate place.

Foster carer forums are a helpful place to share experiences, and Clifford House Fostering would like to encourage you as foster carers to attend these forums, which are promoted as a learning opportunity, peer support group, and an opportunity for the agency to share information and updates, however to protect the child’s identity the use of fictional names or an initial is suggested when discussing and sharing any experiences and practice dilemmas.

Any confidential information given to foster carers at the beginning or during the placement by the Local Authority Social Worker should be passed on to your allocated supervising social worker or support worker, or in their absence a manager for storing in the child’s electronic file.
Contact (Supporting Contact)

Clifford House Fostering believes that as foster carers you are usually the best people to manage contact with birth family, but we also recognise that you will need support through this, please do talk to your supervising social worker or support worker about contact, whether the child in placement should be allowed unsupervised contact, with who, for how long….etc, all of these matters should be addressed in the placement plan and subsequent reviews at the Child’s LAC review

When a child is placed in foster carer the matter of contact with their own birth family will be and should be a key feature of the placement plan. Research tells us that unless there is a sound and professional assessment that concludes the risk is so high contact would be detrimental to the child, every effort should be made to help the child in placement to maintain some type of contact with their birth family. At Clifford House Fostering we would expect everyone involved in the placement to work in partnership to achieve the best outcome for each child and the need for them to have a good understanding of their own identity and family.

As foster carers, this can be difficult. Children’s behaviour can change considerably before and after contact, and this can be emotional, and upsetting for everyone involved. It is important as foster carers that you talk your feelings through with your support worker or supervising social worker and if you are concerned about any contact, discuss this with your support worker or supervising social worker.

Wherever possible and appropriate, children should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their parents and siblings, and parents and siblings should be encouraged to take part in activities organised for their children. Such contacts should be consistent with the child’s Care Plan; which, itself, must take account of any Child Protection Plan or Contact Order that may be in force.

Contact between children and parents or siblings may only be permitted if previously agreed by the child's social worker and set out in the child’s Placement Plan.

Both direct and indirect contact arrangements should always be clearly detailed setting out the purpose, how contact will take place, the venue (or type of meeting place), the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed.

Contact arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

Unsupervised Contact

Children may only have unsupervised contact with parents and siblings with the agreement of the Placing Authority and where the arrangements for such contact are set out in the Placement Plan.
Supervised Contact

The decision about the need for supervised contact will be made by the Placing Authority as part of the assessment and planning process, the reasons should be clearly recorded and the arrangements set out in the child's Placement Plan, which will be regularly reviewed as a minimum at the Looked After Review.

The arrangements will include the details about the role of the supervisor, the extent of the supervision required (it may be sufficient to supervise from an adjacent room) and if the visit is confined to a certain identified area, for example a specified contact centre.

Those supervising such visits should familiarise themselves with the requirements as detailed in the Placement Plan, follow the requirements specified and fully record their observations as soon as possible after the contact visit takes place.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the contact with parents, relatives and friends section)

Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting is one of the most important jobs that councils do, and it is the responsibility of all elected members to take a lead on ensuring that Looked After Children receive a service which makes a difference to their lives, improves outcomes and justifies the need to place a child in care.

Each Local Authority will have their own policy brief on the council websites which can be accessed through internet search engines and all Local Authorities are expected to have lead elected members who take in interest in the scrutiny of children's services in the area they live.

In the wider context Corporate Parenting is understood as the role of every one to play their part in making our society a safe place for children to live and grow up. We should collectively advocate for children where we see and experience behaviours that are not appropriate.

As an agency Clifford House expects all staff and carers to embrace this concept and work to the philosophy that children should be offered a safe, nurturing, and positive place to live and grow, emotionally and physically.

D

Damage to Property

There is an expectation that all foster carers will have insurance which covers them for damage to property by a child whom is fostered. The cost for this is covered within the allowance which is given to carers for each child.
Clifford House has Public Liability Insurance which covers damage for the agency and foster carers for larger, more significant matters, rare in occurrence and the costs are likely to be significant, this will be at the agency discretion.

In the event that a child in placement has caused such considerable damage the procedure which should be followed:

As foster carers you should alert your allocated social worker/support worker or in the event of absence a manager about the incident. A clear record of events will need to be completed and your allocated social worker/support worker will be required to carry out an investigation and make a recommendation to the registered manager.

**Dentist**

A child over the age of two should be registered with a dentist. In some cases the child may be able to remain with his or her dentist, if this is not practical as the foster carer you should register the child with your dentist. If the dentist’s list is closed the matter should be raised at the LAC review so other arrangements can be made to ensure that the child’s dental needs are met.

As foster carers Clifford House Fostering expects as a good parent that you take children under two to family appointments with your dentist to familiarise the child with the environment of the dental surgery.

The question of dental treatment will be addressed at the Placement Planning meeting and consents for treatment will have been obtained from the parent or persons having parental responsibility for the child, prior to placement.

**Delegated Authority**

The revised Statutory Framework for Fostering and Care Planning came into force in April 2011, and this introduced the Foster Carer’s Charter, which the government endorsed the concept that foster carers should be given the opportunities to make a range of decisions about the day to day care of children placed in their care.

Delegated Authority in practice can be challenging, depending on the relationship that the Local Authority has with the child’s birth parents, and who has Parental Responsibility, and also depending on the child’s social workers knowledge of Delegated Authority.

Ideally, Delegated Authority should be discussed with Birth Parents before the Placement Planning meeting, however most children enter the care system in an emergency and this is often why Delegated Authority is problematic.

In practice the most valuable place to discuss Delegated Authority is the Placement Planning meeting, and in Looked After Children’s reviews, and any decisions delegated to the foster carer should be recorded in the placement plan and care plan. As a guide the following areas can help promote Delegated Authority and allow foster carers the experience of caring for children without unnecessary barriers.

- Hair Cuts – discuss and agree in the Placement Plans
• Overnight Stays with friends and foster carer support networks – discuss and agree in Placement Plans and subsequent reviews.
• School Trips up to 4 days – discuss and agree in Placement Plans and reviews
• Medical treatment – discuss and agree in Placement Plans, consents should be given and on file

This list is not exhaustive and is given as a guide and a prompt to encourage conversation and learning, and in practice help foster carers in the task of caring for children in the care system.

Please refer to our policy ‘delegated authority to foster carers’

De-Registration

De-registration means, in practice, that Clifford House Fostering has agreed a foster carers approval should be withdrawn. The issue of de-registration can arise through one of the following ways:

• De-registration can only take place as part of the foster carer review process and foster carers are always told before the review if de-registration is an option.

• Full reports would be sent to carers before the review.

• A supporter, i.e. the Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Worker, or possibly another carer, can be present at the review if the carers wish. (We acknowledge that de-registration can be, for some carers, a painful and distressing process).

• Carers can appeal against the ‘Qualifying Determination’ to deregister them if they wish and will be given 28 days in which to make written representations either to the fostering panel or through the Independent Review Mechanism process (See section on Independent Review Mechanism process). If no representations are received, the Fostering Agency Decision Maker will confirm the decision in writing, giving reasons for that decision.

Designated Person

The term ‘Designated Person’ is described in the National Minimum Standards for fostering, standard 22 (Handling allegations). Every fostering agency must appoint a senior manager to manage allegations and in the case of Clifford House Fostering the registered manager has been nominated the ‘designated person’ and will be responsible for the management of any allegations made.

Please see section on allegations, significant events and notifiable events for further information.
Diary

Any paperwork, policies or diaries issued to foster carers by Clifford House Fostering remains the property of Clifford House and should be returned when a carer leaves the agency.

If foster carers choose to use their own diaries for appointments it is important that children cannot be identified and the use of initials or another symbol is used to identify the child but protect their identity if the diary was to be lost or stolen.

Any paperwork about the child will be electronically stored in the child’s account in CHARMS, the electronic recording system for Clifford House on all foster carers and children placed (See section on CHARMS) and there should therefore be no reason to keep paper copies of any reports. However in the event that as foster carers you do have paper copies of reports Clifford House Fostering would expect reports to be stored securely in a locked cabinet or cupboard with access restricted to you as foster carers only, and with authorisation to Clifford House Fostering Staff and any other authorised professional, such as the placing authority representative or an inspector.

Discipline, Sanctions and Rewards (Behaviour Management, and Promoting Positive Approaches to Behaviour)

Clifford House Fostering has adopted the PRICE (Protecting Rights in a Caring Environment) theory as core principles in managing difficult and challenging behaviours.

Training and support is provided to staff and foster carers in managing the presenting behaviours of children in care and in placement, and further reading and guidance can be accessed in the Clifford House Statement of Purpose and in the Training Policy. Behaviour Management is an area which is likely to be discussed regularly within supervision and at foster carer forums where the opportunity for sharing experiences and ideas is promoted.

The following is an abstract from Clifford House Fostering Statement of Purpose

The agency recognises the often chaotic, traumatic and complex circumstances which have shaped the experiences of vulnerable children and young people. In supporting such children and young people to work through their past in preparation for a more positive future, it is often necessary to find pro-active approaches that encourage their expression through a broad range of behaviour.

Clifford House Fostering is committed to a holistic approach to behaviour, promoting a safe, secure and stable caring environment. Effective parenting, development, support and learning can only take place in an atmosphere that is purposeful and calm.

It is a central aim that all professionals working with children at Clifford House Fostering promote and encourage positive behaviours

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the behaviour and support section)
Disruption Meetings

When any placement disrupts (comes to an unplanned end), the people involved need to be able to talk about what happened and why. This may be through a process of informal discussions with the agency and the Local Authority and discussion in the form of a formal Disruption Meeting. In the case of a long term foster or adoptive placement, it is considered particularly important to look at all of the circumstances of the disruption in order to help the carers, child/young person and the social workers understand the reasons for a very distressing event, and minimise the potential of this happening again.

These meetings are often held a little while after the actual disruption so that some of the immediate feelings of upset have reduced. They can be lengthy sessions, which consider all aspects of the placement in an attempt to reach some conclusions about what happened. Disruption Meetings can sometimes appear threatening, but it is important to recognise that their purpose is not to ascribe blame but to reach a better understanding of everything that has happened, including whether more support should have been provided. Most carers who have been through the trauma of a placement breakdown have found the subsequent disruption meeting helpful.

Drugs Information from Fostering Network

Fostering Network offers guidance and resources on the misuse of drugs. Talk to Frank is a useful website where staff and carers can access information.

Education (Helping Children With Their Education and Learning)

When a child is placed with you as foster carers at Clifford House Fostering it is important in the placement planning meeting to find out if the placing Local Authority has a dedicated education team for looked after children in their area, ask for the contact details, and telephone number, and make contact to discuss the type of support that is available for the child in placement.

It is widely accepted that children in the care system achieve poor outcomes in education and much fewer looked after children go on to further education.

As foster carers you have an important contribution to make to a child's educational progress and development by setting high education expectations. You are in a good position to observe and help identify and assess both the child's real capabilities and any difficulties.

There should be close contact between you as the carer and the child’s school. For primary age children you should ensure that you have face-to-face contact with the school staff regularly. Children in this age group greatly benefit from your visits to the child’s
classroom and seeing their work. It is important that you should attend “parent evenings” meetings unless it is decided otherwise at the child’s LAC Review.

All children should be encouraged to read. To develop literacy skills, it is important that children are provided with an environment where access to books and other reading material is easy and natural. This can be done by, depending on the child’s age, reading to the child; ensuring books are readily available in the home; encouraging the child to borrow books from the library; ensuring the child is heard to read as directed by the school.

The child should be encouraged to complete homework set by the school and have available a quiet place to study. As foster carers you should be available and encourage positive interaction around homework, and promote spending time within the home learning about new concepts and ideas that will help a child in their homework.

The child should also be encouraged and given the opportunities to develop and pursue leisure interests and any special gifts they may have, and to share in the activities of their peers. Children benefit from having the widest range of experiences as this stimulates interest in their wider education. Attendance on school trips should be encouraged. Positive contact with peers and school friends can assist a child’s general learning. The child should be encouraged to visit friends and to invite friends to the carer’s home.

Foster carers of school age children should avoid planning holidays that would result in term time absence. Approval for any holidays will need to be sought by both Clifford House and the placing Local Authority and it is unlikely, unless it is exceptional circumstances that a holiday in term time will be approved. Clifford House Fostering would expect that all foster carers would discuss any holiday in the first instance with your allocated supervising social worker or support worker.

There is an expectation that looked after children will not be excluded and the authorities’ education service is expected to act as a liaison between schools and where it is no longer possible for a child to be educated in mainstream school the child will receive education either from a PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) or by being home tutored.

When a child is out of school, it is acknowledged to be stressful for all concerned. Support will be provided for the carer and the child by the child’s social worker and the supervising social worker or support worker, so all can work towards the successful re-integration of the child into education. The Education Service will support, and in the case of permanent exclusion, provision will be made to provide an alternative education placement for the child.

The child’s educational needs will be set out in their Personal Education Plan. It is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to liaise with carer, parents and the school, in drawing up the Personal Education Plan, which is then updated 6 monthly. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that the child’s educational needs are being met and information is being shared appropriately to enable the child to benefit as fully as possible from his or her education. If you do not have copy, please ask the child’s social worker.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the Education section)
Emergencies

It is inevitable that at some point during the placement of a child emergencies either within the foster family or with the child placed, will happen during the course of a fostering career.

It is important that as foster carers you have a good support network, and someone close to the family who can be called upon to look after the child in placement if an emergency occurs.

It is also important that foster carers own children have somewhere they can stay in the event that you need to provide support to a child in placement if there is an emergency. For example if the child is taken into hospital and needs someone to stay with them, as with one’s own children Clifford House Fostering would expect you as foster carers to remain with the child in hospital (age and condition dependent).

Any emergencies should be reported immediately to your allocated social worker or support worker, a manager in their absence, or the on-call person if the emergency happens outside of normal office hours, the number is 07837247299

Emergency Placements

The vast majority of children in care are placed with foster carers in an emergency and sometimes on the same day.

Whilst on the same day it is not possible to hold a placement planning meet and draw together the placement plan it is important that some essential information is given in order to provide a safe placement and look after the welfare of the child in placement.

Consent for medical treatment, consent for the child being looked after, basic details about the child, any conditions, allergies etc is essential.

Any issues around contact or prohibited contact should be discussed, and any restrictions on who the child should have contact with.

Any behavioural issues, and risk taking behaviours, either to the child themselves or to others should be discussed during the referral process and identified before the placement has been agreed.

Whilst this will be discussed before the child is placed, Clifford House Fostering encourages foster carers to take on the lead role when the child arrives and ensures that these are matters are addressed giving foster carers the information needed to care for the child safely.
Equipment

Please see Health and Safety section

Equality and Diversity (Valuing Diversity)

In practice Clifford House Fostering would expect all staff and foster carers to treat each other, children, colleagues, and anyone that they work with and engage with in a respectful way that does not ignore an individual’s wishes about their choice of faith, sexual orientation, or their ethnic backgrounds.

It is important that where children are placed from a different ethnic background to the foster carers, the placement plan helps to inform any practices that will support the child to have the opportunity to continue accessing dietary/personal care products/peers and other sources of material and community resources to meet the child’s needs and choices.

Being placed in the care system increases the risk of children being ‘labelled’ and ‘discriminated’ against, and can leave the child vulnerable to feeling ‘different’. As foster carers it is important everything that can be done to minimise a child feeling unnecessarily labelled as a ‘child in care’. This work should always be discuss within

the team of professionals that are involved in the child’s life, and should be based on what the wishes and feelings of the child.

Clifford House Fostering Equal Opportunity policy underpins the work of the fostering service. It recognises that people can be discriminated against on a number of grounds including, but not exclusively;

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Religious belief
- Age
- Marital status
- A lesbian or gay lifestyle
- HIV status
- Any personal characteristic or circumstance

The work of the agency, its policies and procedures are grounded in the notion of equal opportunities and the belief that such a policy can combat discrimination and prejudice and help people to value and promote diversity.
It is essential that foster carers are sensitive to issues of equality of opportunity, feel able to challenge discriminatory behaviour or language in and outside the family home, and are able to provide positive role models for the children in their care, and actively promote equal opportunities.

Clifford House Fostering expects its foster carers to confront racism/sexism and racist/sexist abuse whether from children and young people, their parents or family members, professional workers or members of the public. It will support carers in confronting homophobic behaviour and abuse directed at them, members of their family or children in placement and expects carers to provide a positive environment for all children and young people, regardless of their sexual orientation. Similarly, Clifford House Fostering will fully support foster carers who challenge discrimination against children or adults having a disability and will do its best to assist foster carers in meeting the needs of children with disabilities, placed with them.

Foster carers will be given support and training in this aspect of their role and in any particular aspects of physical or cultural needs of children from different race, culture or religion. Foster carers who are caring for a child or young person whose racial, cultural or religious background is different to their own will receive additional support, information and training to help them to promote a positive understanding of and pride in the young person in relation to his or her heritage. In such situations it is likely that the child’s social worker will undertake a specific piece of work with the child in order to promote his or her self-esteem and sense of identity.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the equality and diversity section) and should be read in conjunction with the practical guide above.

Equal Opportunities and Foster Carers

Clifford House Fostering will consider all individual enquiries and applications to foster in accordance with the Equal Opportunities policy. Any enquirer or applicant having clear discriminatory values and attitudes would not be considered suitable as a foster carer. Similarly, any existing foster carer who displays values, attitudes and behaviours at odds with promoting equality and valuing diversity, will find their continued suitability to foster, is questioned and may be the subject of formal review.

Anyone making application to foster on behalf of Clifford House Fostering will be considered primarily, on the basis of his or her ability to provide appropriate care for a child or young person. Clifford House carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers against the Fostering Form F1 assessment format (BAAF2000). Assessment is based on the ability of applicants to demonstrate or to evidence their potential for achieving these competencies.

Clifford House Fostering's recruitment, support and training of foster carers reflects its commitment to providing a range of foster families sufficiently diverse to meet the ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and religious needs of children and young people requiring placement as well as any needs relating to gender, disability or sexuality. This may mean that recruitment campaigns will be targeted in order to best meet the needs of children in need of placement.
Placement will be made on the basis of a “matching” process, which identifies the needs of the child and seeks to provide a placement which best meets the needs of the child.

**Exemptions and Extensions**

The details of this policy can be accessed from our [Fostering policies](#) (Following this link will take you to the Exemption and Extensions section)

**Foster Carers Charter**

The [Foster Carers Charter](#) was launched under the lead of Tim Loughton, the then Children’s Minister.

The Charter set out the principles that Foster Carers should be at the heart of each child’s care arrangements, and should be valued as a key partner in decision making.

Clifford House endorses the Foster Carer charter and the spirit of which it aims to achieve.

**What Foster Carers can expect from Clifford House Fostering:**

**Working in partnership**

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise that makes the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We will:

- Value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children every day and know them best.
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children you care for.
- Ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance.
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- Respect confidentiality.

**Information**
We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child’s need.

We will:

- Give you all the information you need in order to care safely for the child
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement (except when there are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information as soon as possible)
- Ensure that there is a placement plan drawn up in discussion with you and agreed with you in advance of placements (except in emergencies where this will be done as soon as possible).
- Provide you with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements
- Provide you with full details of all relevant departmental policies and procedures.

**Clarity about decisions**

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We will:

Ensure that, wherever possible, you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family.

Provide clarity about any decision you cannot take at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what. This will be looked at in detail within the placement plan.

**Support**

We recognise that fostering is an isolating and challenging task and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child in your care.

We will:

- Respond positively to requests for additional Support
- Provide you with formal supervision every month and regular phone or email contact.
- Give you honest and open feedback provide you with access to 24-hour support.
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner.
• Pay fees that reflect your skills.

• Ensure that there is a local group, recognised by the fostering service, where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.

Learning and development

As a fostering service we recognise the important role that foster carers play in caring for children and young people. We have provided foster carers with a range of training and development opportunities to develop skills in meeting the needs of looked after children.

We believe that foster carers must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career.

This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We will:

• Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task. At appropriate times, including weekends and evenings.

• Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.

Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We will:

• Consult with you before changing terms and conditions

• Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you

• Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should you be subject to an allegation

• Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales

• Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.
Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you, staff, managers and the Directors
- We will listen to foster carers
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you.
- Give clear expectations around children’s care plans and the foster carers role within that.
- Give you timely feedback from consultations.

What Clifford House Fostering can expect from Foster Carers:

Working in partnership

Foster Carers will demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.

Will:

- Demonstrate expertise and make use of skills to the best of carers ability and provide children with an experience of family life
- Attend meetings about the children and young people that carers care for
- Work with the agencies involved with the child such as school, health and religious establishments.
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child’s life
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures
- Respect confidentiality.

Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

Carers will:
• Respect and promote a child’s religious, linguistic and cultural heritage afford the same level of protection and care to a child as carers would their own child in accordance with the national minimum standards

• Ensure the child has the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.

Information

Carers believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

Carers will:

• Inform the supervising social worker/support worker about changes in the household

• Inform the supervising social worker/support worker about any difficulties that arise.

Learning, development and support

As foster carers you must be support and given access to learning and development opportunities throughout your fostering career. This will ensure that as carers you will have the skills and knowledge that is needed, and allow for development and growth in practice to help transform the lives of the children placed with you at Clifford House fostering.

Carers will:

• Be prepared to develop their skills throughout our fostering career

• Attend relevant training

• Take up opportunities offered

• Let Clifford House know if Carers are unable to attend and contribute to support groups.

Communication and consultation

Carers believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

Carers will:

• Respond to local consultations and discussion in order to inform the development of the service.
• Meet with supervisors and managers and others in order to promote dialogue and a good working relationship.

Fostering Social Worker/Supervising Social Worker

A Fostering Social Worker is also known as:

• Supervising Social Worker

At Clifford House Fostering the common term used for a Qualified Social Worker working for Clifford House is supervising social worker

The primary tasks of the supervising Social Worker are to recruit, train, assess, supervise and support foster carers who provide care for children and young people who are looked after by foster carers. Within this role supervising Social Workers are expected to take responsibility for the formal supervision of foster carers and ensure that carers are meeting the need’s of the child in placement.

The supervising Social Worker works closely with the child/ young person’s social worker. This may include attending reviews and case conferences relating to the child/ young person

Family Support Workers

Clifford House Fostering employees family support workers to work directly with foster carers, offer training, support and supervision. Family support workers will hold lower caseloads in recognition of their unqualified status.

First Aid

All carers are expected to attend a first aid course and the re-fresher training to maintain basic knowledge about how to respond to a medical emergency and administer first aid.

Particular attention should be paid to the policy on ‘homely remedies’ and what medicines can be administered, for how long and when to seek expert medical advice.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the Medication and First Aid section)

Foster Carer Agreement

This is the agreement which is signed by both you as foster carers and Clifford House Fostering immediately following approval. It sets our responsibility to you as Carers and your responsibilities as foster carers, and provides the framework within which you will work in partnership with Clifford House.
Foster Carer Forums

Foster carer forums are a place where staff and carers come together, share training, experiences and spend time reflecting on the challenges of being a foster carer.

Clifford House Fostering encourages all foster carers to attend forums as a way to seek support from other foster carers and use the opportunity for sharing learning.

In consultations about support foster carers agree that a support group/forum is one the best ways to reduce the feelings of being isolated or alone as a foster carer, particularly when looking after a child with challenging behaviours.

Fostering Panel

Clifford House Fostering Panel plays an important role in quality assuring assessments and reviews of foster carers, making recommendations about the suitability of prospective carers and of reviews for approved carers.

The above link to the policy will give details about the functions, the panel composition and the roles that panel members play.

Panel can be a nervous experience for some carers. Clifford House Staff can support carers through this process and your allocated social worker or support worker can help demystify the panel process, and explain what will happen during the panel and what kind of questions might be asked.

Panel Procedure

Recommendations from each case heard at panel are made by each voting panel member. These recommendations are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for Clifford House Fostering who will, using the presenting paperwork, and minutes of the panel, consider the recommendations and make a decision about each case.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the fostering panel section) Also it explains about the Membership, Meetings and Administrative Functions, Conduct of Panel Business Conflicts of Interest, Agency Decision Maker, Resignations and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers, Responsibilities of Clifford House Panel Member, Responsibilities of the Chairperson and Vice Chair(s), Monitoring and Quality Assurance, Panel Member Undertaking Confidentiality Bond and a Flowchart with the Fostering Panel Decisions
Fostering Network

Fostering Network is one of the UK’s leading charities for anyone involved in foster care, they provide expert advice and support to foster careers and fostering services.

Clifford House Fostering endorses the support that Fostering Network can offer foster carers through membership, paying for each foster carer household to become members.

As a member all foster carers and staff can access a range of services, these services can be accessed through the fostering network.

G

Guardian Ad Litem (Children’s)

A Guardian is appointed when the court wants an independent view of what has been happening and what should happen in the child's life. A Children's Guardian will normally be appointed in care proceedings under The Children Act 1989. Children’s Guardians are also involved in adoption proceedings.

The Guardian will have been appointed by the court from CAFCASS (Children And Family Court And Support Service). CAFCASS will appoint professionally qualified social workers with considerable experience of working with children and families.

CAFCASS are independent of the local authority in which the court has agreed to an Order for the child.

As foster carers it is important that children are supported to be able to share their own views about their future, and are supported to spend time with the guardian appointed so that the guardian can tell the child’s story in court where the child is not able to do this themselves.

H

Health (Promoting Positive Health)

Ensuring that children in care are physically and emotional healthy is a key outcome for every professional involved in working with children who have been placed in the care system.

Once a child has been matched with you as foster carers a placement planning meeting and placement plan will be the next important part of the process where the health plan for a looked after child should be discussed. All foster carers should be informed about any medical conditions, allergies, or diagnosed illnesses and the health assessment with the Looked After Children’s Nurse/Doctor should be organised. Discussions should also take
place about what Doctor’s surgery the child is registered with and whether a temporary registration with the carers doctor’s needs to be completed, this same process should be undertaken with the dentist.

For further information on home remedies, first aid, medication administration, medical emergencies, and recording please access the link below.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you the medication and first aid section)

Health and Safety

Foster carers and supervising social workers/support workers and managers at Clifford House must ensure that foster homes are physically safe for children and young people to live in.

A Health and Safety check is carried out with you:

a) As part of your assessment for approval as foster carers
b) Annually as part of your review and re-approval.
c) Informally by you and your Fostering Social Worker/support worker, when each child / young person is placed with you to make sure that your home environment meets their particular needs.

This check covers the following areas:

- Space and environment
- Health and Safety (e.g. there is a stair gate if caring for young children)
- Health and Hygiene
- Fire Safety and Prevention
- Outdoor Safety
- Car

More generally it also ensures that as foster carers you are providing an environment which support the child and young person to develop within a framework which is age appropriate, such as toys, games and play equipment

Holidays

Many foster carers take their foster children on holiday with them but there are circumstances in which this is not possible or desirable. For example, you may have booked a holiday before the child/ren were placed with you – or you may book a holiday in the belief that they will no longer be with you at the time you have planned to go away, and they still are. Alternatively, you may feel that you need a holiday away from your foster children, perhaps just with a partner or with your own children.
In any of these circumstances you should talk to your Supervising Social Worker/support worker and afterwards agree who will share this with the child’s social worker and arrangements will be made for the children to be looked after elsewhere. Sometimes it may be hard for you to explain to the children why they can't come with you – your Supervising Social Worker/support worker may be able to help.

As foster carers you are not expected to take children out of school during term time. Holidays with any looked after child should be discussed in the first instance with your supervising social worker/support worker and then with the child’s social worker to seek permission and approval to take the child/children on holiday.

I

ID Cards

All foster carers will have their photo taken as part of the approval process to become approved foster carers for Clifford House Fostering. Carers will be issued with an ID card when they are approved and it is advisable to ensure this ID is available for inspection by relevant and appropriate professionals at any time, or during an emergency with medics, the Local Authority etc.

Immunisations

Where a child under the age of 5 has been placed with foster carers it is important that every effort is made to establish what immunisations, if any have not been administered.

The Looked After Children’s Doctor/Nurse in the placing Local Authorities area will be able to assist in this event.

Income Tax

HMRC know that foster caring is an important service. They know that foster carers are not the same as people who sell goods and services to others. For this reason, there's a special scheme for foster carers called 'qualifying care relief'.

A foster carer’s status is self employed, which attracts tax relief. Clifford House Fostering encourages foster carers to complete the on-line E-learning course that the HM & Revenue Customs have devised.

At the end of each Tax Year the Finance Department will supply you with a financial statement detailing your total income for the year.

For further information visit the HMRC website and search foster carers. The Fostering Network website and helpline will also be able to assist you in these matters.
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

The following guidance has been taken directly from the BAAF website where further information about the role of the IRM can be found.

Since April 1st 2009, the remit of the IRM has included an independent review of fostering suitability applications from potential and current foster carers whose fostering service provider has decided not to approve them as a foster carer, or to terminate or change the terms of their approval.

If you are a prospective or an existing foster carer who has recently received a qualifying determination which you don’t agree with, you have two options:

- you can either apply to the IRM for a review of fostering service provider’s qualifying determination
- you can make representations to your fostering service provider.

However, you can not do both. The cost of having your case reviewed is met by your provider.

What the IRM can do for you

The IRM is a review process conducted by a Review Panel which is independent of fostering service providers. If you choose to use the IRM the review panel will, where appropriate:

- review your suitability as a prospective foster carer(s) to foster a child,
- review any proposed changes to your terms of approval,
- make a fresh recommendation to your agency on your suitability to foster a child and the terms of your approval, including approval for a specific child.

Things the IRM doesn’t do

- It does not make a decision about your case which is done by your fostering service provider. The reason is because the IRM is not a higher appeals authority.
- It does not consider the suitability of the care plan for a child e.g. whether they should be long-term fostered.
- It does not handle complaints against the fostering service provider. Complaints should be dealt with through the fostering service provider's complaints procedure.

How the Review Panel works

The Review Panel considers the following information to make its recommendation:

- all information presented to the original fostering panel,
- any relevant information received by the fostering service provider where the papers were sent to the fostering panel; and your reasons for requesting a review.
If the Review Panel needs further information, this will be requested from your fostering service provider before the panel meeting, unless it would be more appropriate to ask you directly.

You will be invited to attend the meeting and a separate waiting room will be made available to you and the representatives from your fostering service provider. The Review Panel will meet with yourself and the representatives from your provider to ask for clarification of information contained in the reports. They may need to meet separately with your fostering provider during the meeting to clarify any third party confidential information that you are not entitled to see. The panel will also obtain legal advice and medical advice, should it wish to do so.

**Independent Visitors**

The Children Act 1989, and subsequently the Care Planning Regulation, Placement and Case Review 2011 outlines the requirement that every Local Authority is required to provide a service for children in care that gives them the opportunity to access an Independent Visitor and advocate.

Independent Visitors are particularly important where children have been accommodated by a Local Authority, placed with foster carers and have no contact with any member of their family. In these circumstances Clifford House Fostering foster carers and staff should ensure that the issue of advocacy and an independent visitor is discussed within reviews. Where it is evident that a child is not happy with a plan that the Local Authority is making for them the Independent Visitors service is key, given that it is a requirement that staff from the service are not employed by the Local Authority and can act on behalf of the child without any issues of professional conflict.

**Insurance**

All foster carers are provided with legal protection through membership with fostering network which Clifford House pays for.

Insurance through the [Fostering Network](#) gives carers access to a 24-hour legal helpline, which carers can consult about any matter. It also includes an entitlement to legal costs insurance should carers have to defend against a criminal charge resulting from an allegation of abuse. Costs are paid on a finding of not guilty, and also on a guilty finding if the carer has pleaded not guilty and the solicitor thinks he or she has a good case. Given that legal costs can easily run into hundreds if not thousands of pounds this is obviously valuable cover.

Foster carers are expected to insure themselves against any wilful damage, accidents/injury within the foster carer home and annual health and safety checks are undertaken to reduce and minimise any risks to children in placement.

At the beginning of each placement you as foster carers and your supervising social worker/support worker should review the health and safety of the foster home and any
equipment such as garden facilities, areas of risks, such as swings, toys, ponds should be reviewed and remedial action taken where risks are identified.

Clifford House Fostering has its own Liability Insurance which covers you as foster carers for larger damages that occur. In the event that significant damage occurs to the foster home an investigation will need to be undertaken by your supervising social worker or support worker to explore the claim and make a compensation recommendation, with a supporting report, and relevant evidence to the registered manager.

**Introductions**

When a child or children need to be looked after in a foster home, it is important that where it is possible the child/children and family are able to meet you as foster carers before the move takes place. If a placement needs to happen very quickly it may be possible for the child to visit the foster home a day or two before the move.

When children are placed long term or for adoption, the introductory process will be lengthy, carefully planned and monitored, as it is very important to be sure that this is the right “match” for the child and the family. As foster carers if you have decided to look after very young children and the decision has been made to place the child/children for adoption you will be expected to work very closely with the new ‘adoptive family’. This is a difficult and emotionally challenging task and one which requires everyone to work closely together. A social worker from the adoption team will meet with you and your supervising social worker/support worker to talk about the process and what will be expected of you.

If a foster placement is required in an emergency and has to take place so quickly that no introductions are possible, it may help the child if their social worker can show them some photos of your foster family and your home, children, pets and so on, so that things won’t be quite so strange. In all situations, providing the child or young person with a copy of your Carer’s Profile will help them to make some sense of what is happening for them.

**Inventory**

It is important that you keep a record of what clothing and other possessions the child / young person has when they are first placed with you and also what you provide for them.

This measure protects both you and them, it also is a way of you being accountable for how you spend the money you receive to look after the child/ young person

K

**Kinship Care/Family and Friends Care (of Birth Parents)**

The term kinship care refers to the care being provided by the relative or family friend of a particular child / young person.
The Children Act (1989) says that when children and young people need to live away from their parents, social workers must look to their wider family (including close, significant family friends) for a possible placement. The PLO (Public Law Outline) further launched the expectation that local authorities would exhaust all possible avenues in endeavouring to identify a family member who could meet the child's needs and prevent further damaging the child by placing them in care.

In this research, knowledge and experience recognises that it may be less upsetting for a child to move to a known person. It is considered that the attachment the child/children has with an extended family member is more likely to meet the emotional needs of the child/children than to place them with carers who has no emotional attachment to the child/children.

Research also shows that the most successful foster carer placements in terms of the length of time a child / young person remains in the Looked After System are those where the Child / Young Person is placed within their extended family (including close, significant family friends).

The decision to place a child within their family is based on careful considerations of what is in the child's best interests. If an appropriate relative or significant family friend is identified and is willing to be considered as the full-time and potentially long-term carer of the child / young person, they will undergo a kinship/family and friends assessment – Similar to a Form F assessment, with a specific focus on the child.

This assessment is a rigorous process and focuses on the ability of the prospective carers to meet the needs of the specific child / young person while recognising the particular contribution and relationship they can offer. Their application to be approved as kinship carers/family and friends carers is considered by the Council's Fostering Panel. Their approval is specific to the child / young person placed with them; they are not approved to be foster carers for unrelated children / young people. This would require a separate application process. At the point the child / young person in their care moves on, the kinship/family and friends foster carer will be deregistered.

Kinship/family and friends foster carers are required to work in partnership with the expectations that are placed on 'general' foster carers (e.g. keep a record of significant events, have a safe caring policy, attend the child's reviews, be annually re-assessed, manage contact between the child / young person and their family etc).

It can be a challenging and difficult time for relatives and family friends wanting to care for a child / young person in these circumstances to have to go through an assessment and approval process. The on-going involvement of the children’s services in their lives and the life of the child / young person in their care can also be difficult to understand.

Kinship/family and friends foster carers play a significant role in offering care within the extended family network.

As foster carers and staff working for Clifford House it is important to understand it is likely that children placed in the short term, where they are unlikely to return to their birth parents, the Local Authority will be required to assess all family members to identify whether the
child can be placed within their own family in the long term before any other arrangements can be considered.

L

LAC Nurse

There will be many titles/labels and terms which as foster carers you may not have heard before or understand the meaning of. The ‘LAC’ Nurse is in full the ‘Looked After Children’ nurse, which is a role requires by law and which every Local Authority will be expected to offer every child which becomes accommodated and lives in the care system.

All children who are living in foster care will be monitored carefully by health professionals and will have a medical when we first enter the care system and then annually.

The ‘LAC’ nurse can play a valuable and helpful role to you as foster carers. When a child is placed with you it is important that you ask the child’s social worker who the LAC nurse is and ask for contact details as someone who can provide helpful and knowledgeable information about the health needs of the child you are looking after, in particular with younger children the offer of helpful hints and tips about milestones and child development and for more complex teenagers the LAC nurse may be able to offer support together with the CAMH’s service to provide specific support to the child in placement(Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service)

Leaving Care

Leaving care can be both an exciting and upsetting time for young people who have been living in foster care.

For those young people who have had the experience of living in a settled foster home for a sustained period of time the experience is usually related to how long they can stay within the foster home after their 16th birthday and whether the Local Authority has a policy which allows for the young person beyond their 18th birthday.

This guidance is broken down into two sections

1. Staying Put – Please read our Fostering policies

2. Practical support for young people who are reaching the age of 16

Where young people in placement with you are approaching the age of 16 you, your supervising social workers/support workers and the Local Authority social workers should be discussing the development of a ‘Pathway Plan’ with the young person in placement, which is essentially a plan for helping the young person to develop the skills that they require to be able to live independently. Some Local Authorities will choose to transfer the young person’s case to a ‘care leavers’ team a ‘16+ team’ with a personal advisor and
some Local Authorities will choose to develop a 14+ team transferring the case at a much younger age, others will have long term teams.

In summary there are many ways in which Local Authorities manage their services to care leavers, and it is therefore extremely important that as foster carers, you and your supervising social worker or support worker work in partnership with the placing Authority to explore what the arrangements are and how Clifford House Fostering can support the young person in placement.

In conjunction with this plan it is likely that dialogue take place about where the young person should live, whether they should stay in foster care and when they should move on to a supportive living type environment.

Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers is a helpful guide that explores what support Local Authorities are required to offer care leavers, and offers a definition of categories of children entitled to leaving care support from the age of 16-25.

Accessing an Independent Visitor or an advocate can be of particular importance to young people in the transition stage from a foster placement to moving into independence and it is vital that young people are given details about how to access these services and of their entitlement to independent advocate support

**Legal Status (Children and Young People)**

The introduction of the Children Act 1989 placed a much stronger emphasis on keeping children with their families. As a result, children are now much more likely to enter the care system because of crisis and be in need of more complex services. Most children are in care because they have been abused or neglected.

“A child is Looked After by a local authority is in their care by reason of a court order or is being provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with the parents or with the child if he is 16 or over”.

Children Act 1989 Guidance and regulations Volume 32.2

There are two ways a child can become “Looked After”.

- **Where there is a court order, which requires the local authority to accommodate the child.**

This may be a full Care Order (S31 Children Act 1989), an Interim care order (section 38), Emergency Protection order (S44 Children Act 1989), Police Protection Order (S.46 Children Act 1989), Child Assessment Order (S43), Children Act 1989, A child may be detained by police under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 or remanded to local authority accommodation, including secure accommodation under S23 CYPA 1969. A Child remains Looked After when placed for adoption under S13 of the Adoption Act, until an Adoption Order is made. Under S12 of the CYPA 1969, a child may be subject to a Supervision Order with a residence requirement.
Where a child is accommodated, with parental consent, under section 20 of the Children Act.

A child over 16 can give his or her own consent to be accommodated under S20. Sometimes a child is subject to care proceedings but no court order is made and the child is accommodated by agreement with the parent. Often in these circumstances, there will have been concerns about the care of the child and the parent is agreeing to work with the authority. In other cases, a child is accommodated under section 20 (also known as voluntary accommodation) as a result of being outside the control of his or her parents. In the case of a young person, this may happen if there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, or the young person has been abandoned or thrown out of home. (With younger children, such events would be likely to result in care proceedings and the local authority seeking an order). If the parents remove their consent, the child will return home, unless the Local Authority decides to initiate court proceedings under the Act.

Life Story Work

Life story work plays an important part in helping a child who is looked after and not living with their own families to understand why, and provide an opportunity through a range of mediums (Play therapy, 1-1 sessions, and informal conversations) to aid the recovery process and help children develop coping strategies, and come to terms with their own life history.

As foster carers you play a key role in this process through work on ‘Life Story Books’. This is essentially about capturing the time that the child is placed with carers through photo-graphics, pictures, memory boxes, letters, entry tickets, activity memorabilia etc, both whilst the child is in placement and the positive life experiences they have been provided with, but also the contact that takes place with family and capturing this where possible to provide the child with a memory of positive time with their own families.

Medical Examinations – Foster Carers

As part of the assessment process for approval as a foster carer a medical report will be obtained for each applicant.

Under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011, we require all applicants to have a full medical. This is carried out by your GP using a BAAF Adult 1 Form. Clifford House will pay for this.

Medicals will need to be updated every three years and will be monitored at the relevant Foster Carer Review.
At any stage in your fostering career we may ask you to undertake a long-term medical to reassure us and you that you are fit and well to enable you to undertake the task of fostering (e.g. following a period of ill health or after accident) or that a condition already known about will not be worsened if you wish to continue fostering.

**Medical Examinations – Looked After Children/Young People**

Clifford House will have been given delegated authority when a child is placed and have a responsibility to ensure that the child’s health needs are met. A looked after child should have a medical examination to assess their health needs prior to placement, unless they have had such an examination within the last three months. If this is not possible, it is the child’s social worker’s responsibility to arrange for the health assessments to be carried out as soon as possible after the child has been accommodated.

During the placement children under the age of 5 years should have an assessment of their health at least once in every six months until their fifth birthday. For children over 5 years, health assessments must be undertaken at least once a year.

The health assessments should result in a written report which will be considered through the LAC reviewing process. The child’s physical health and emotional health will be considered at the LAC review.

It is important that the child is encouraged to follow a healthy life style by eating a balanced diet and by being active. Older children’s health needs include provision of information about issues such as alcohol and drug use and sexual health.

As foster carers it is important that you record these appointments in the child’s health plan and pass on any information to the child’s social worker and the supervising social worker/support worker.

**Medication**

Please refer to section on Health (Promoting Positive Health)

**Meetings**

Meetings will be a regular feature in the task of fostering, both for you as foster carers and for children in placement, and by the agency in developing carers and staff skills and knowledge about fostering and ensuring that children in placement are receiving a good service and their needs are being met.

There is an expectation that as foster carers you will endorse the foster carer charter, meet the terms of the foster carer agreement and work in partnership with Clifford House Fostering to achieve best practices in working with children and young people in care and their placing authorities, and any other partner agencies involved in the child or young person’s care.
Mobile Phones

This guidance aims to provide a ‘helpful ear’ around the use of mobile phones but acknowledges that the most suitable place to organise and agree boundaries about the use of mobile phones for any child placed with Clifford House Fostering should be at the first placement planning meeting when a child is placed and then discussed where necessary at subsequent review meetings or in consultation with the child’s social worker and carers supervising social worker or support worker.

Where a child or young person has a mobile phone the most important consideration is for the safety of the child. As adults, and parents of children, and as professionals we all share this same worry. Contracts are often the best place to provide a clear set of rules for young people, carers and professionals, and parents where possible and/or appropriate. Whilst acknowledging that this can be seen as institutionalised, in the right circumstances a written contract can offer a way of providing some clear boundaries. The following is a set of guidance for what should be considered within each contract or when a child or young person has a mobile phone;

- Age appropriate use of the phones – Can the child take their phone to school? Do they need to hand in their phone at the end of the evening before they go to bed?
- Safety – does the phone have internet access and if so has the carer, social worker and child all signed the contract to agree that the carer will periodically check the phone for appropriate and safe usage? And if the agreement has been made that the phone will not be checked document why.
- Where there are concerns about the use of the phone carers should report them to the child’s social worker and discuss appropriate sanctions – should the phone be removed?
- Where it is considered and evidence is available to suggest that the child’s mobile phone is placing the child at risk the phone can be removed as an immediate measure. If this situation occurs reporting to the supervising social worker or support worker and discussions about who should inform the child’s social worker should be done at the earliest opportunity and action to remedy this situation taken. This should be recorded within the contract.
- Contact with birth families can often be the source of distress and upset. If the use of a mobile phone affects contact negatively with family this should be reported and consideration given to what measures can be taken by the child’s social worker to address this.
- How is the credit for the phone managed? It is the responsibly of the young person to maintain credit for their personal phone with the support of their carer. Consideration should be given to pocket money, activities and any part time working undertaken by the young person. Appropriate support to encourage ordinary ‘teenage behaviour’ in relation to current mobile phone communication should be considered carefully. It is imperative that looked after children are not discriminated against simply because they are in the care system and they should still be given the same opportunities as their peer groups whilst being mindful of the safeguarding issues.
- There is often pressure from young people for adults and parents to agree to take out a mobile phone contract on behalf of the young person. It is important
to note that this is not something which Clifford House Fostering can support. There have been many occasions when young people have been unable to resist the temptation of spending long periods of time on the phone running up huge bills and we would want to protect both young people and carers from this happening in the future.

Moving House

Clifford House should be informed when you as foster carers are thinking of moving house, so that the implications for present and/or future placements are discussed and considered. The Foster Care Agreement requires that the fostering agency is informed (in writing) of “any intended change of address”.

As part of any move a review of the Health and Safety assessment will be undertaken.

National Insurance

As a self employed foster carer you will need to consider the contributions you should make for National Insurance.

It is important to remember that the payment of National Insurance Contributions entitles you to benefits, including your state pension.

Clifford House Fostering website has further information regarding National Insurance.

Clifford House Fostering also encourages foster carers to complete the on-line E-learning course that the HM & Revenue Customs (HMRC) offers to help foster carers.

The Fostering Network help line will also be able to assist you in these matters

Also your local HMRC office will be able to help you with any questions you have.

No Smacking Policy

All Foster carers are entrusted with the care of vulnerable children and young people and as such are trusted to use discipline appropriately. The Children Act 1989 and its associated Regulations and Guidance, states that foster carers may not use physical punishment with children. It is Clifford House Fostering policy therefore that corporal punishment may not be used at any time for fostered children by you as foster carers when you have been approved by Clifford House Fostering. As foster carers we also ask you to consider whether you should use this form of discipline with your own children.
The following are some of the reasons why Clifford House Fostering believe children should not be physically punished:

- Children may be in the looked after system because they have been physically abused; any form of physical punishment may remind them of the abuse and could be very scary;

- If a policy is never to smack a child then you can easily defend yourself against a statement (perhaps by the child or the parent) that suggests that you have used physical punishment inappropriately. If you were to routinely smack the children you looked after, it would be very difficult to prove that the slap was reasonable rather than too hard;

- Many people think that physical punishment doesn't work; at best it may simply teach the child to behave in the “right” way in the sight of an adult who will hit as punishment, what Clifford House will help carers to achieve is for children to behave in a consistently acceptable way and understand and take responsibility for their behaviour. Please also see training and behaviour management sections to clarify further the philosophy that Clifford House has adopted in working with children who display difficult and challenging behaviours.

Clifford House Fostering recognises that this No-Smacking policy may cause problems for some people involved in the day-to-day care of children / young people. For example you may use some form of physical punishment with your own children.

Most of you as foster carers will have some experience in bringing up children and will have worked out your own ways of disciplining. Clifford House Fostering accepts that some of the children that are placed with some carers behave in ways, which in some circumstances, are beyond the usual methods of control, and also recognise that it may be impossible to stop an older young person from doing what they choose.

It is important to remember that together staff and foster carers are part of a team; talk through with your supervising Social Worker or support worker and the child’s social worker about any challenges in terms of discipline, and discuss and agree on what punishments might be appropriate to that particular child’s situation.

Clifford House Fostering has a range of experienced qualified practitioners who can offer support, guidance and help. The foster carer forums and supervision are strongly recommended as mediums to share the challenges that the task of fostering brings to you as carers and your families.

**Notifiable Events**

Also see ‘Significant Events’ section
During your career as foster carers there will inevitably be from time to time a serious event/incident or circumstances that need immediate attention. For example, if a child in your care has a serious accident and requires hospital treatment for a broken bone.

The law and legislation sets out for fostering agencies what events must be reported and who they should be reported to.

For ease the following events must be reported to your supervising social worker or support worker:

- Death of a child
- Serious illness or accident (Clifford House Fostering would expect you as foster carers to inform your supervising social worker of any trip to the doctor or hospital, and if a serious accident occurs to notify your supervising social worker or support worker, or the on-call manager as soon as is practically possible after the event)
- Any infectious disease that has been diagnosed in the foster home by a health professional
- An allegation made by the child in placement to you as foster carers, or any disclosure of abuse
- Child is missing from your care
- Involvement of a child in prostitution
- A complaint the child has made about the care they are receiving either about you as foster carers or anyone else
- If the police are called to your home

**Nursery Provision**

Where the provision of nursery is seen as a positive development for the child in placement, it is important that agreement has been sought in the first instance from your supervising social worker or support worker and then subsequently from the placing authority social worker.

Young children in placement are likely to have suffered some form of abuse and attachment difficulties and the reason for using nursery provision should be thought through carefully and with the child’s needs at the centre of any decision.

The cost of nursery is expected to be covered through the fostering allowance if the hours agreed exceed the government's allowance for children aged 2 and 3.
On-Call

The On-call service is available to all Clifford House Fostering foster carers 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week.

The service is aimed at providing support to you as foster carers in an emergency, where your allocated supervising social worker or support worker is not available.

In the experience of Clifford House Fostering it is often a call to share how difficult a situation has been or to report an incident which helps you feel that you are not alone. It is however also important that as foster carers you adopt the Clifford House Fostering philosophy that children should not be exposed to an immediate placement breakdown, and any ending of placements should be made in a planned way, unless such circumstances places either the child, carer or a household member at risk of harm.

The On-Call number is 07837247299

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the On call section).

Overnight Stays

Also see section Babysitting, day care and sleep overs within this guidance.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the overnight stays section).

Passports

If as foster carers you want to take fostered children in placement abroad, it is important to talk in the first instance to your allocated supervising social worker or support worker and then subsequently to the social worker in good time so that arrangements for getting the child/ren a passport can be made. Depending on the legal status of your foster child, it may be that the parent(s) will have to give their agreement to the issuing of a passport, or the local authority may have to agree, requiring a signature from the Children's Services Manager. The procedure is usually reasonably straightforward but obviously can take time if parents have to sign the documents, or if the legal status of the child is complex.
Payment Scheme and Allowances

The allowances offered to foster carers approved by Clifford House Fostering have been broken down into two components; the contribution towards looking after the child (which includes a contribution towards you obtaining home insurance that covers malicious damage) and the reward element for fostering.

Child allowance

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</tbody>
</table>

All placed children are entitled to the following:

- Pocket money
- Long term savings
- Clothing allowance
- Activities
- Personal need items

This will be discussed and agreed through your Supervising Social Worker at the initial stage of a child being placed in your care.

Your child allowance is a contribution towards the costs of living; this includes travel costs. Additional payment may only be considered at the discretion of the Fostering agency if you travel over 200 miles on a weekly basis.

It is the responsibility of the carer to ensure that they financially meet the needs of the placed child from the child allowance. Where a new placement is made, if required you can claim in advance up to 2 weeks client allowance that will be deducted from your first payment after 28 days of care.

Respite Allowance

Carers will be entitled to 7 days paid respite, for every six months or for 180 nights that a child is in Foster placement with them. If 3 children are in placement for the whole 6 months, then the foster family will be due 3 x 7 day respite allowances.

Should a child’s placement end prior to a six month period, a running record of the number of nights they were fostered by the foster family, will be held by the agency and when the foster family has provided other foster placements that together total 180 nights placement; they will then be due 7 days respite.

When the 180 nights have been completed and 7 days respite has been earnt, this can be taken as a block 7 day respite break or as short breaks (both should be planned with your supervising social worker or support worker) or as an additional financial payment- with no break from the child.
To make it easy, we have put together a table that informs you of how and who receives allowances when respite is either taken or paid

**Respite Payment Guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Foster Carers reward allowance</th>
<th>Client allowance</th>
<th>Pay respite carer reward allowance</th>
<th>Foster carer receives additional reward allowance per child in placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child goes on respite</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Split between main carer and respite carer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child remains with Foster Carer</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child goes on respite with foster carers own support network</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes Carers to pay direct to support network</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes Carers to pay direct to support network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Respite has been provided to offer personal space in support of foster carers maintaining placements.

- Respite is allocated at a rate of 7 days (one week) for every six months (180 nights) a child is in placement. A central record of current number of placement nights for each foster family is held by the finance department.

- Where children are placed with respite carers, the payment of the respite allowance is calculated by how many nights they have been in their care.

- When children go on respite with respite carers, the finance department will ensure that the respite carers receive a payment for the client allowance for the duration of the respite. (as per the table in the respite policy)

- Main carers will receive an element of the client allowance that relates to meeting the long term needs of the child (as per the table in the respite policy)

  Where respite is not taken, after six monthly intervals of the placement commencing, Clifford House Fostering will pay the respite days owed via BACS.

- The carers reward allowance for respite will apply as per the foster carer’s current level of pay. Where there is more than one child in placement, carers receive 20% less on their reward allowance after the first child.
Your role and responsibility as an approved foster carer will be monitored and supported by the Agency under the terms and conditions of the Fostering Regulations and Standards relevant childcare and Fostering Regulations. The Fostering agency will need you to maintain account sheets for the following:

- Child pocket money
- Childs savings
- Clothing
- DLA (Disability Living Allowance, if received)

**Payment Scheme**

Clifford House Fostering has a payment scheme which rewards foster carers depending on their skill base, and can be illustrated as follows

**Level 1**

(A) for newly approved foster carers who have attended preparation group training

(B) for carers transferring over from other agencies who have experience of looking after children in care for at least 1 year

**Level 2**

for carers who have been on the scheme for at least two years.

Payment levels for each of these levels are set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Reward Payment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Level 1** | (A)£300 per child + child allowance  
               (B)£325 per child + child allowance |
| **Level 2** | (A) an additional £50 payment per week to the carer  
               (B) an additional £25 payment per week to the carer |

Reward for achieving this level is not related to the child, but in recognition of the skills of the carer and is therefore an acknowledgement of this.

Payment will be calculated and made monthly in arrears, separate to your weekly placement allowances, provided you have a child in placement.
## An Overview of the Requirements of Each Level of the Scheme

Full details of the requirements of each level are available upon request.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reward Level</th>
<th>Broad Description of Entry Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1            | To achieve Level 1 Status both carers must have attended all preparation group training and have been approved through fostering panel process.  
To remain at level 1 both carers are expected to have completed the workshops set out in the training section/policy  
To remain at level: Commitment by **at least one** approved foster carer in the household to attend **at least four** post-approval workshops within a twelve month period.  
Commitment to fulfil the TSD standards for Foster Carers within twelve months of approval (national requirement). |
| 2            | Fulfilment of all Level 1 Requirements above for at least two years and approval as level 2 carer through the fostering panel process.  
To be considered for level 2 it will be a requirement that at least one member of the fostering household undertakes a formal qualification such as the NVQ level 3 which relates to fostering children  
Further commitment by **at least one** approved foster carer in the household to attend **at least four** post-approval workshops in each year.  
To achieve level 2 foster carers must demonstrate a commitment to learning and development through annual reviews and on-going supervision, carers will also be expected to support other, newer carers and take part in the development of the service, attend forums, events and participate in service consultations and developments. |
| Standalone Scheme | This is a Standalone scheme providing placements generally for the most difficult to place children, where the LA has made this assessment and the referral and where the enhanced payment has been decided outside of the payment scheme levels 1 and 2  
These placements as usually recognised where there is a requirement for a sole placements, or a mother and child placement |
Principles of the Payment Scheme

- The scheme is designed to be fair, open and robust, supporting the highest possible standards of foster care.
- The scheme aims to provide a clear career pathway for foster carers, rewarding and supporting on-going post-approval development and child-focussed foster care.
- Progression on the scheme is dependent upon on-going evidence of competence. Although experience and attendance at post-approval workshops are important factors they do not guarantee progression. There is, for example, no automatic progression based upon experience alone.
- Regular attendance at post-approval workshops is seen as an essential component of the scheme for two reasons: it promotes post-approval learning and development; and it provides opportunities for experienced foster carers to share experiences and knowledge with other carers. Consequently, although relevant training run by other organisations may be accepted by the Team Manager (Fostering) as “counting” towards workshop attendance in specifically agreed cases, the general expectation is that the workshops will be a significant source of post-approval training for foster carers.
- Whilst it is hoped that the majority of foster carers will progress to at least Level 2 of the scheme, those who fail to meet the requirements of a specific level may be downgraded to a lower level. For example, if a Level 2 carer fails to attend post-approval workshops or fails to offer high quality foster care they may be downgraded through the foster care review process to Level 1. (NB As at present, more significant concerns may result in a recommendation to terminate approval as foster carers altogether).
- Standalone scheme is based on the skills of the carers, and the matching needs analysis undertaken by the placing authority, it is likely this level will require carers to manage ‘sole placements’ or child and parent type placements
- Foster Carers who, for personal reasons (such as bereavement or a significant change in family circumstances) need to take a break from fostering, will generally resume their fostering at the same level as the one they were on when they stopped fostering. For example, a level two foster carer who has to take a break from fostering for six months will generally resume at Level 2, not return to Level 1.

Progression through the Scheme

Progression through the scheme is achieved through the foster care review process, the means established through regulation for assessing the quality of foster care provision. Clifford House Foster Care Review formats assist evidence gathering and support appropriate foster care progression through the scheme.

In order to ensure consistency and independent scrutiny, all decisions related to progression within the scheme are based upon a full foster care review considered by Clifford House Fostering Panel, not a home review.

As the review may delay the progression of foster carers moving up a level, reviews can be brought forward if agreed by the manager

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Demonstrating Competence – Some Examples.

The fostering social worker will assist in the gathering of evidence, particularly for those foster carers unfamiliar with demonstrating their competence.

Evidence of competence to assist progression through the scheme can be drawn upon a combination of the following:

- Foster carer recording.
- Written evidence of completed tasks, e.g. foster carer’s assessments, observations of contact sessions, descriptions and reflections upon specific placements.
- Evidence gathered through the foster care review process, e.g. comments or direct observations of children’s social workers, other professionals.
- Evidence of supporting a broad range outcomes for children in care, e.g. engaging with teachers, supporting health professionals, supporting children to access therapy.
- Detailed observations by those who have run post-approval workshops.
- Evidence gathered for other assessment-based formats (e.g. NVQ Level 3 or AKAMAS, the online award in working with children and young people).
- Attend and involvement in events and forums
- Involvement and contribution to the running of the service
- Leading or taking part in training
- Providing support as a ‘buddy’ to newer approved foster carers

It is expected that all relevant evidence will be gathered into a portfolio by the foster carers, supported by your supervising social worker or support worker, for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

Please refer to the training section in this handbook for information about training workshops

**PEP Meetings (Personal Education Plan)**

Personal Education Plan meetings known as PEP meetings are held every 6 months.

When a child is placed in care for the first time a new PEP will be developed within 10 days and then subsequently reviewed every 6 months. Some local authorities will work with schools together to bring together the LAC review and PEP meeting, others will hold the meetings separately.

As foster carers it is important that you are informed about the child’s PEP, what the targets are for the child in placement and what support is available for the child.

Also refer to Education section in this handbook for further information
Pets

Pets can be a positive addition to a placement; however they also give rise to the following issues:

- Some children can be cruel and antagonistic towards animals
- Animals behave differently to non-family members of the household and also to visitors.

During the assessment process and at any point when carers are considering the addition of a pet a risk assessment will be completed on all your pets and animals to make sure that a child / young person placed with you, and your pets, will be safe.

Informing us of any significant change in your household should also include letting us know of changes of pets and animals – this is crucial information.

Permanent Fostering and Special Guardianship Orders

Clifford House Fostering endorsed the philosophy that all children should have the opportunity to experience positive family life which is safe, nurturing and stable. Stability allows children to develop attachments, recover from emotional trauma and grow both physically and emotionally.

Once a Local Authority has decided that a child is unable to return to their own birth parents an alternative plan will be considered. At the beginning of this plan it is likely family members will be assessed, and adoption or Special Guardian’s may be considered with either family members or the foster carers of the child whom they have been living with. These options will be considered in most cases before the Local Authority looks at long term fostering, and the reason for this to provide the child with a primary carer who will have Parental Responsibility for them, giving children the opportunity to experience some time as an ordinarily child without the status of being a ‘child in care’.

In a number of cases the child in this situation may have a higher level of needs, which are likely to require additional support, Local Authorities will aspire to provide permanent foster carers, however in reality these children may live in the care system until they reach adulthood.

This is a complex area of work, and one which can be confusing and at times upsetting for foster carers when a child has been in the placement for some time and there is a parallel plan which is looking at moving the child.

There is some helpful guidance for foster carers and staff on this as follows:
The Clifford House Fostering Policies has created a link to the National Association of Fostering Providers who have developed a useful leaflet on Long Term Fostering and Special Guardianship Orders.

Fostering Network and BAAF also have helpful information about this subject.

For carers and staff at Clifford House Fostering the issue of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) can be a difficult one. As positive role models and endorsing that children should have stable placements comes with some conflict if Local Authorities approach foster carers in Clifford House about applying for a SGO.

There is an agreement between Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies that where the Local Authority seeks to approach any carers about becoming Special Guardians they must first inform the agency manager to discuss.

This agreement is set out in the ‘Transfer Protocol’ for foster carers which is taken from the fostering network website.

This allows for some clarity of the situation and avoids carers becoming involved in a potential conflict.

Photographs

Special photographs are very important to all of us, and can be especially precious to children living away from their own families. Foster children should be allowed to keep their photos in whatever way they wish – some children may want to hide them away, so that they are the only ones who can look at them, whilst others may want to display them proudly. It is helpful having extra copies made of particularly important photos as sometimes these may be destroyed if a child is particularly angry or upset about their past.

Clifford House Fostering wants you as foster carers to take photographs of children you look after as part of helping a child have a photographic memory of their journey in life, and to provide some god memories of positive experiences. It can be very reassuring to foster children to have their photo in the family album, as it makes them feel a special part of that family even if only for a short time.

If a request is made for a photo of a child / young person in your care, to appear in a newspaper, school prospectus or similar, you should speak in the first instance to your supervising social worker or support worker and discuss seeking permission from the child / young person’s parent and social worker. Some foster placements are confidential and this could be jeopardised by identifying photographs.

Finally, a brief word of warning about taking photos. Some (very few) children have been forced to pose for photos as part of an abusive relationship with an adult, so tread carefully if your foster child shows fear or distress when the camera is brought out; it may be bringing back unhappy memories. (Obviously in this case you would want to talk about this to the child’s social worker).
Pocket Money

The national allowances and guidance for pocket money can be accessed within Clifford House Fostering Policy at the above website.

Pocket Money is now reflective of age i.e. different amounts for different ages.

Pocket money is given regardless of behaviour - it is not linked to the behaviour agreement. (However, if a child is being abusive or there are risks associated with them holding money, decisions can be made to hold the money for the child).

Clifford House Fostering believe that carers have a responsibility to help children in placement develop life skills which includes managing money and budgeting, and therefore will be required to open a bank account for children/young people in their care, and help children in placement learn that long term saving is important.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the pocket money section).

Police

As foster carers there are a number of events that may require you to call the police to your home or to call the police to report an incident.

As responsible corporate parents we all play a part in ensuring that children and young people in the care system receive the best possible care and as foster carers we would expect that if the police are involved in any situation regarding the child in your placement your role is to advocate for and support the child appropriately as any good parent would to maximise the welfare and safety of the child.

If as carers you have any reason to call the police or if the police have called you about the child in your placement you are expected to contact your allocated social worker or support worker, or a manager in their absence, or on-call if the matter is outside of normal working office hours. A written account of the event will also be required from you.

As good parents Clifford House Fostering believes that children in care are already exposed and vulnerable as a group, and therefore criminalising their behaviour is something which we hope can be avoided where at all possible.

Placement Planning Meeting

The following is an extract from our Fostering policies:

Once a decision has been made to make a placement, a pre-placement planning meeting should take place between you as the foster carers, your supervising social worker or support worker and the Placing Local Authority. If appropriate the child and his/her
family/significant others should attend. This meeting must consider and agree the detailed placement arrangements for the child.

Where it is not possible to hold a pre-placement planning meeting, for example where the placement has to be made in an emergency, a planning meeting must take place within 5 working of the placement.

The main purpose of the planning meeting is to share full information about the child with you, the foster carers and agree the contents of the **Placement Plan** which will include confirmation of the following arrangements:

- Registration of the child with local health professionals (GP, Dentist & Optician) and arrangements for the child's health care (including the administration of medication). Any other health professionals involved will be informed of the placement by the Placing Authority and a decision made by the relevant health trust with regard to future plans for their continued involvement or moving to a more local provision;
- Signed medical consent from the Placing Authority and parents if appropriate;
- Plans for the child's schooling and educational needs, including seeking the role of the foster carer in implementing the child's **Personal Education Plan**, Statement of Special Educational Needs (where applicable), any extra educational support, etc. This should include the education arrangements for children under 5 and the training or educational requirements of those over 16;
- Regularity of visits from the Placing Authority's social worker. (These should take place within one week of the placement and thereafter at least every six weeks (unless the placement is to last until the child is 18 in which case after the first year visits can be at least every three months);
- If appropriate, details of contact arrangements with family members/significant others (including whether the foster carer has delegated authority to make arrangements for the child's social visits to friends and relatives including overnight stays);
- Any specific cultural, religious or dietary needs of the child;
- Any behaviour management issues;
- Where the proposed placement relates to a young person whose plan includes leaving care, arrangements should be in place for their preparation for independence including their Pathway Plan;
- The steps that the fostering agency will take if reviews and visits do not take place within the designated timescales, for example contacting the child's **Independent Reviewing Officer**.

The planning meeting will also agree whether there will be a period of introduction for the child prior to the placement - see **Section 3.3, Introductions**.
As well as providing the Placement Plan, the child’s social worker should also be requested to provide as much information about the child as possible, for example:

- The Chronology of significant events in the child’s life;
- A copy of the Care Plan;
- Any other relevant information about the child. For example, recent Looked After Review reports, Pathway Plan, Personal Education Plan, reports from specialists or therapists.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take to the placements for children policy).

**Private Fostering**

A private foster carer is someone who is and looking after a child under the age of sixteen years who is not a relative for a period of more than 28 days.

Private foster carers must tell the local authority in whose area they live, that they are looking after a child in this way; Children’s services must then arrange for checks to be carried out to ensure that the family is suitable, and may be able to offer advice and help, although this does not usually include financial reward.

If you know someone who you think might be a private foster carer you should suggest to them that they seek advice from children’s services in the area that they live.

**R**

**Recording Policy**

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the recording section).

**Recruitment Strategy**

Clifford House Fostering has an annual recruitment strategy which can be accessed through the above website

Clifford House Fostering is proud to work in partnership with both Local Authorities and foster carers to provide a service to children in care and improve their life outcomes. As part of the recruitment strategy Clifford House aspires to develop a whole range of carers with a variety of backgrounds, skills and the ability to look after children of all ages.

However, Clifford House Fostering also believes that the expertise in looking after some of the more challenging young people is an area which should be promoted further with clear expectation and rewards for carers who decide they can offer this service.
Please see Payments section for details on payments to carers.

In recognition that as foster carers you are best people to describe what fostering is about and how Clifford House Fostering supports carers we will offer a financial incentive to every approved foster carer with Clifford House Fostering who recommends anyone interested in fostering and who is subsequently approved through the Clifford House Fostering panel process.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the recruitment strategy section).

Regular Guests in the Foster Home or People Staying for a Period of Time

It is necessary to make checks on people staying regularly or for a period of time, in the same way as checks have to be made on other people in the household as part of the approval procedure. No checks are needed for people staying infrequently for the weekend (e.g. twice a year) or for short periods, but as foster carers you should be alert to the potential risks and positively discouraged from taking people into your homes anyone you do not know well, or who could offer a potential risk to foster children.

This policy is in line with the policies on babysitters and sleepovers. If you are at all unsure if a visitor falls into this category please discuss the matter with your supervising social worker or support worker.

Rehabilitation

Sometimes known as “reunification”, this is the process of returning a Looked After child back to their family of origin.

Your role as foster carer’s in this process is crucial. It will involve being very careful not to create a very different routine and expectations for the child / young person (e.g. lots of new clothes, more pocket money than they would have from their family, later bedtimes et cetera) as these may influence a child / young person’s willingness to return to their family.

Usually the parent(s) and foster carers take great pleasure in seeing children go happily back home. Being involved in a rehabilitation plan, however, can be a very difficult experience, and as foster carers you may be anxious about the sort of care the child will get at home.

If you are in this situation and you do have worries, it is very important that you talk about them to your supervising social worker or support worker. If you are anxious about a child going home but don’t really want to say because you know the plan is for rehabilitation, whatever you think, you could unknowingly give the child the wrong message about the parents and maybe even sabotage the plan, without meaning to. So don’t forget, share your concerns – you will probably find that the social workers have also got their own worries and then you will be better able to work with the plan knowing that your views have been heard and discussed.
It’s important to recognise that you may get upset when the children go home, even if you are perfectly happy about where they are going; you can’t have children in your home for a long time without being attached to them and it follows that you will be sad to see them go. Don’t worry about the children seeing you a bit upset when they go; they will feel valued if they know that the people they care about will miss them. There may also be feelings of relief mixed with the sadness – it’s okay to own up to those as well.

**Religion**

Every local authority and independent fostering agency has a duty to make sure that the religious needs of all children in the looked after system are properly met; this means that we have to try to place children with foster carers of the same religious persuasion as the child and if this is not possible we would ask you to undertake to help and encourage the child to practice his or her own religion. If the religion of a child placed with you was completely different from your own, and it was important to the child and the family that he or she had the opportunity to practice this religion, we would ensure that you had the help in this respect from someone with the experience of that religion.

We would welcome applications to foster from people with a wide range of religious beliefs and we would respect your needs and those of the your family; however we would not want foster carers to impose their religion onto a foster child by insisting church attendance, for example. If you are regular worshippers and it is not appropriate for any reason for the foster child to accompany you, it may be possible for the supervising social worker or support worker to make alternative arrangements for the child during that time.

**Removal of Children from the Foster Placement**

Removing a child from a foster home will only take place where there are significant concerns about the wellbeing of the child. Other sections in this handbook and in the Policies for Clifford House Fostering regarding child protection can explore further the types of circumstances which may result in a child being removed.

**Review: Children and Young People (LAC Review)**

It is a legal requirement that the Local Authority who placed the child with foster carers at Clifford House Fostering carry out formal reviews of each child.

The review process is the way in which Local Authorities make sure that all the agencies are working together to ensure that the needs of the child are met.

The review should be child focused, and undertaken in a way that helps the child to have their voice heard. The Care Planning Regulations 2010 set out a requirement that all Chairs of reviews (IRO’S) should have independence, and should visit the child before the review, taking the opportunity to ensure the child has the chance to speak openly and share any worries they might have.
The review is a multi-agency process to which foster carers make a critical contribution. As the carer, it is you who often knows the child best, on a day-to-day basis, in a way that no one else does. If there are difficulties that you need to raise at the LAC review you should discuss these with your supervising social worker or support worker beforehand to decide whether the review is the right place.

When a child first becomes “Looked After”, a review must be held within 28 days. Generally, at the first review, an assessment is being carried out which will inform the care plan for the child.

The second review is held within three months and should focus on the permanency plan for the child.

After the second review, there will be reviews every 6 months. This cycle repeats itself if the child moves placements.

The review process must canvass the views of all involved in the care of the child; parents, carers, health, education and any other agency involved in providing a service for the child. The child is central to the review process and the views and wishes of the child are critical and must be included, subject to the child’s age and level of understanding. Even very young children can contribute by drawing pictures for the review, even if they are not attending a review meeting. Consultation booklets are usually sent to children and carers prior to the review and can be helpfully used as the basis for discussion in a review meeting or meeting with the chair. If the child has an advocate, he or she may wish their advocate to attend.

Clifford House Fostering asks all foster carers to help children with this process in a way that is proportionate to their age, and the use of drawings and pictures of the period since the last review is a helpful way of showing the family and the Local Authority that the child in placement is happy and making progress.

The LAC review is the place where the care plan for the child is made and is the only forum in which the care plan for a child in care can be changed. The review looks at the identified needs of the child and whether the placement meets or continues to meet his or her needs.

An Independent Review Office (IRO will chair the review and will not be involved in the social work management of the case and will provide an independent perspective.

Traditionally, the review has taken the form of a meeting but increasingly, children and young people are encouraged to make decisions about how they would like their review to be conducted. It is for the child to decide with his or her social worker, who will be invited to attend the review meeting. Sometimes the child will decide to meet with the chair and their social worker or their carer. In this case, the chair will arrange to meet separately with the child’s parents and the child’s social worker will collate information from other relevant agencies so that the review can make informed decisions. At other times, the child will elect not to attend a review meeting including all relevant agencies. At other times, the child will want to attend a large review meeting. Whatever form the review takes, it is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to liaise with all the relevant parties and issues raised, information provided and decisions made, will be included in the review minutes.
Review minutes will be sent to all relevant agencies, parents, the carer and the child (if of appropriate age and understanding).

The agenda for the review process looks at the following:

- The care plan
- Decisions from the last review
- Health
- Education
- Legal situation
- Contact arrangements
- Activities
- Complaints
- Placement
- Independent visitor/Advocate
- Decisions
- Date and venue for the next review

**The Care Plan**

When a child is first looked after, there is likely to be a period of assessment of the child’s needs in order for a Care Plan to be made at the second review. The Care Plan can only be changed at a Looked After review. Examples of Care Plans are; “reunification to the child’s birth family” or “twin tracking/Parallel planning”. The latter means that if the re-unification/rehabilitation fails, there will not be any undue delay for the child in achieving permanence. Other examples of Care Plans are “adoption” or “permanent care within the extended birth family” or “permanent foster care”. It is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to ensure the carer and the parents have a copy of the care plan.

When a child first comes into the Looked After System, every effort will be made to enable the child to safely return to his or her birth family.

“The Children Act rests on the belief that children are generally best looked after with both parents playing a full part and without resource to legal proceedings (“The Care Planning and Placement, Case Review Guidance and regulations Volume 3)

The Care Plan for a child will change over time because whilst it is essential that strenuous efforts are made to reunite the child with his or her birth family, this is not always possible and children cannot always wait for their parents to change. The child’s need for stability and permanence will take precedence if the birth family has been unable to make the changes necessary for successful re-unification, within a reasonable timeframe.

Minutes of all reviews should be sent to the carer and the child in placement where this is age appropriate.
Reviews: Foster Carers

Underpinned by the fostering regulations 2010 the following practice regarding annual reviews is carried out once a foster carer is approved with Herefordshire fostering service:

- 1st annual review will take place within 12 months of the approval date. As part of the review as foster carers you are expected to have completed your Training, Development Standards and have attended the required training (please see training section).

- Reviews following the 1st panel review will continue to take place annually within twelve months of the previous review.

- Clifford House Fostering will strive to achieve foster carers returning to the fostering panel once every three years. Where this is not possible home reviews or reviews carried out by the manager will be undertaken.

- The outcome of every review will be reported to the fostering panel.

- As part of every panel review a report will be provided to the panel from the fostering social worker, child’s social worker and foster carer.

- Foster carers will be called back to a panel review if a serious concern, complaint or allegation has been made against them.

- As part of the review supervising social workers and support workers are expected to provide essential information to ensure that all the requirements of the fostering regulations have been undertaken. These checks include
  - Number of supervisions taken place
  - Dates of 2 unannounced visits within the twelve month period from review the current review
  - Updated Health and Safety check
  - Safe care policy relevant and up to date
  - DBS checks accurate and up to date
  - Medical checks up to date
  - Manual training requirements have been met
  - Development and Training
  - Development of skills and any recommendations to progress to a higher level of payment
Safe Caring

Clifford House expects every foster carer household to have a Safe Caring Policy.

This is usually decided and discussed as part of your assessment. During this process we learn how you plan to protect your own children, yourselves and the child / young person placed with you, from the possibility of allegations being made against any of your fostering family.

Once you are approved, the theory becomes reality and you will be in a position to write down your rules and test them against the real world of fostering.

A family Safe Caring Policy is needed in all situations, not just when it is known or suspected a child / young person has been abused, or might have a history of making allegations (false or proven). We never fully know what a child / young person brings with them into foster care, nor indeed how their families will react to another person looking after their child.

For these reasons you are expected to create a Family Safe Caring Policy which must then be altered and adapted for each placement you have. Your supervising social worker or support worker will help you to create this. In addition, the Placement Planning Meetings can be used to underline what specific changes need to be made for the specific child you receive.

It is not possible to look at this area fully in a general handbook. However in general a family Safe Caring Policy relates and is underpinned by the following areas:

- Managing difficult behaviour
- Managing sexually overt behaviour
- Building up self-esteem
- Building pride in a child’s identity
- Breaking down stereotypes
- Recording information – What to include

More specific examples of what this means in practice and how a safe care policy might look are:

- Knocking on bedroom doors
- Leaving doors open so that you can see what is going on
- Not walking around without being appropriately dressed

A family Safe Caring Policy should cover the following areas:

- The names you use
- Showing affection
In the bathroom
The way you dress
Playing
The foster carers’ bedroom
Children’s bedrooms
Bedtime

Accompanying your handbook is the Fostering Network book ‘Safer Caring’ which will give you more guidance and a range of suggestions for making a foster home a safer place for all its members.

Training will also be provided for every foster carer on ‘safe care’

**Sexuality**

Sexualised behaviour and sexual exploration are features of most children’s lives and as such, are part of their own exploration of themselves.

Many children who come in to the Looked After System are confused about what constitutes normal/healthy sexual behaviour. Some of them have experienced sexual abuse or have inappropriately seen / witnessed sexual behaviour.

Children and young people need to understand what healthy / normal sexual behaviour and contact is. Helping children of whatever age, to discover their sexual identity and / or feelings takes sensitivity and understanding from you as foster carers.

**Adolescence**

Adolescence is a time of experimentation, and sexual experimentation comes is likely to play a part in a young person’s thinking on a regular basis. As foster carers you need to feel comfortable about talking about sex to both your own children and to foster children and young people placed with you. Young people need to feel they can come to you for advice – they are less likely to make mistakes if they have the right information. If they feel you are easily shocked, they won’t be helped to work out their own morality and they may simply relish the shock factor. However, you will of course want to be clear what you think is acceptable and why, and you must certainly be wary with young people who are under age – if you think your under sixteen years old foster child is, or may become, sexually active, you should talk to your supervising social worker/support worker or her / his social worker about what advice to give.

Some young people in foster care may be homosexual – gay or lesbian. If you are looking after a young man or woman who thinks they may be homosexual, it is very important to listen seriously and not assume that this is “just a phase”. It may indeed be something the young person will pass through, but if their basic sexual orientation is towards others of the same sex it could be damaging not to have this taken seriously. You may need help here with your own feelings and with what to advise the young person - talk as always to the
Supervising social worker or support worker, or get advice from any gay friends you have or gay organisations – always respecting the young person's right to confidentiality of course.

**Significant Events**

The Children Act states that birth parents retain “parental responsibility”, i.e. a duty to care for and make proper arrangements for their children, when their child is accommodated, whether on a voluntary basis or when subject to a Care Order. The Act also requires foster carers and social workers to work “in partnership” with parents; consulting and informing them of significant developments or changes in their children's lives.

When children are placed with Clifford House Fostering it is important to establish in the placement planning meeting if it is appropriate for you as foster carers to be the link with the parents, and if you are expected to contact birth parents, in what circumstances.

In most circumstances the child’s social worker will be the connection between Clifford House Fostering and the birth parents, and therefore any events that are not part of everyday life, such as an accident, injury, incident, a child goes missing, is arrested etc should be recorded and reported immediately to your supervising social worker or support worker.

The following list is a helpful guide of the type of events that need to be recorded and reported:

- Changes in child’s health, e.g. illness/accident requiring medical attention, routine and emergency treatment.
- Changes in child’s education, e.g. change of school, exclusions, parents’ meetings regarding the child’s progress, school reports.
- Changes in residence, e.g. holidays, absences, overnight stays, respite arrangements.
- Involvement with the police, e.g. interviewed/charged re offences, court appearances, witness statements.

It is particularly important that social workers are made aware of any situations where the child in placement is at risk of serious harm, e.g. drug abuse, suicide attempts and prolonged absences.

Whilst it is accepted that as foster carers you must be allowed to exercise your own judgement and discretion, and allow for the need to treat each case on its own merits, it is essential that as carers you air on the side of caution – if in doubt, consult/inform your supervising social worker or support worker. Some events will also need to be passed on to Ofsted, the regulatory body.

**Smoking Policy**

The health, safety and well-being of children and young people are at the heart of policies and practice related to children in care. This includes taking into consideration the effects
of smoking on children who are in foster care, and recognising the important role foster carers and social workers/support workers have in protecting all aspects of a child’s health whilst they are in care.

Whilst it is acknowledged that some current carers smoke, it is Clifford House Fostering policy that carers must not smoke in front of children in their care and that efforts must be made to discourage children and young people from smoking.

This means that as foster carers you must not allow children to smoke in your foster carers’ home and you will seek advice to help a child to give up smoking.

Clifford House Fostering acknowledges children’s rights to:

- Be brought up in a home that is smoke free
- Expect that doctors, nurses, teachers, foster carers and all Children and Young People staff will set a good example by not smoking
- Schools, youth clubs and public places that are smoke-free
- Be taught about the impact of smoking on health and well-being
- Be taught how to recognise and resist pressures to smoke Not be sold cigarettes and tobacco products
- Be free from any form of tobacco advertising and promotion
- Live in a community where non-smoking is the normal way of life for all age groups

Clifford House Fostering will make every effort to support and encourage carers who wish to give up smoking.

Matching considerations for carers who smoke will be considered carefully during the assessment process, and no children under the age of 5 will be placed with foster carers who smoke.

Matching considerations will consider any significant health needs of an individual child and assess where foster carers have been identified as a good match with the exception of the matter of carers smoking, that if they smoke, whether the placement can meet the health needs of the child. Further advice in this circumstance can be taken from the medical advisor or the child’s G.P/designated doctor or nurse for the Local Authority.

The below websites can offer further information on the effects of smoking

Smokefreeaction
Fostering network

Social Worker – Children / Young People

Children in the care system will be allocated a social worker who will be responsible for the care planning of the child on behalf of the Local Authority and in partnership with the birth parents.
Social workers work with the whole family, not just the child/ren, and although their primary concern is for the child’s welfare they do have to balance this with the wishes and needs of the parents. They should keep you informed about the progress of the plan for the child and any changes of plan or direction.

The child’s social worker should make regular appointments to see you and the foster child. The law says that they should see the child within the first week of placement, then at least six-weekly during the first year. When a permanent care plan has been decided the visits can reduce to three-monthly. The child / young person’s social worker has a duty to see the child / young person’s bedroom.

If as a foster care you or the child in placement is having some difficulties contacting the social worker it is important to let your supervising social worker know so that they can work to try and resolve this.

**Strategy Discussion**

If there are concerns that a child may be suffering or has suffered significant harm, a Strategy discussion will take place under Child Protection Procedures between children’s services, the Police and any other relevant agency e.g. Health and/or Education. This will normally take place within two working days of the referral.

The purpose of this discussion is to decide whether a section 47 investigation is required. This will determine whether action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child. Those involved in this process will also be alert to the needs and safety of:

- Siblings
- Other children in the household
- Children in other households with whom an alleged offender may have had contact

The overall task of the section 47 investigation is to assess the needs of the child and the capacity of the parent or wider family network to adequately ensure their safety, health and development. Following this, a plan of action will be drawn-up.

As foster carers you are not ordinarily invited to strategy discussion and should seek the outcome of such meetings through your supervising social worker/support worker.

**Supervision (Making the Most of Supervision)**

Supervision is an important part of anyone’s practice and as foster carers it is considered a key part of your training and development and an opportunity to reflect and learn from fostering experiences. Supervision also allows you time to consider complex case dilemmas and give you space to think through and share strategies and ways of helping a child in placement with your supervisor.

As foster carers you will receive regular supervision by your allocated supervising social worker or support worker.
Supervisions are held to enable a positive, and supportive opportunity, to help carers to develop and progress in their ability to learn and manage the complexities of caring for child in care and working with a range if professionals.

Supervision is an opportunity as foster carers to share views as well as to develop skills.

**What is Supervision?**

- Supervision is a formal arrangement for meetings between carers and their allocated supervising social worker. Supervision is essentially a supportive and enabling two-way process.
- To ensure carers understand how they contribute as a member of a team.
- To enable carers to contribute effectively to the planning process for the children and young people or whom they are caring.
- To give carers appropriate monitoring and feedback on their work.

- To support carers by providing oversight and advice or by making this available from elsewhere as appropriate.
- To help carers cope with the stresses that caring may entail.

- To ensure that carers are able to develop their skills and knowledge by having their training and support needs assessed and all the opportunities for development identified.

**What happens in Supervision?**

Supervision meetings are the formal part of your relationship with your allocated supervising social worker/support worker. They should happen monthly. As these are formal meetings an agenda has been devised and a supervision contract has been created to structure the sessions. All the meetings will be recorded and signed by all the parties involved.

**The supervision contract will include:**

- The frequency of the meetings
- Duration of the meetings
- The venue for meetings and
- The agenda for these meetings
The agenda includes:-

- Placement issues and meeting the needs of the child in placement
- Support arrangements for you, your family and the placement
- Training and development
- Safe Caring practice
- Concerns
- Any other business

What should I do before/during/after supervision?

Supervision is an opportunity for you to think about the work you are doing as a carer, to raise difficulties and to think about ways to develop your own skills and experience. Supervision tends to work well when you have had time to think about the issues involved. If possible these meetings should be a time to focus on you and your family, without interruptions – however, it is recognised that sometimes other events will overtake the process such as emergencies within the placement.

You will receive a copy of your supervision.

If you are unhappy with the arrangements for, or the contents of, the supervision meetings, then you should speak to your supervising social worker or support worker, or in the event that you are making a complaint about the support you receive them you will need to speak to the manager.

Who should be there?

Supervision meetings take place between you as the carer and your allocated supervising social worker or support worker. This should include an opportunity to speak to all the members of the fostering family – including the children. When this is impossible, the principle carer should be seen.

Supervision and the Annual Review?

The supervision meetings will be an important part of the material collected for your annual review. This will include any concerns recorded, or commendations that you have received during the last year. This should mean that there is nothing in the annual review that you are not aware of or have been unable to address with your allocated supervising social worker or support worker.

Supervision, Training and Development

Supervision should help create possibilities to help carers to grow and develop in the work that they do, and in identifying training needs to meet the Training, Support and Development Standards that must be completed within the first year of being approved as a foster carer.
Supervision Templates

Ask your supervising social worker or support worker for a blank copy of the supervision form for you to be able to familiarise yourself with the agenda items that will need to be covered. It is important to remember that supervision is a two way process and although there are important subject matters that need to be discussed it is also an opportunity for you to ask advice, share information or raise concerns.

SUPERVISION VISIT – Guidance for supervising social workers and carers

“Supervision” means “the support, development and monitoring of foster carers”

Agenda

- Refer to guidance within supervision form

Items To Be Covered At Every Supervision Session

Child’s behaviour, health, education, contact issues, care plan and how the foster carers are managing these areas

Support needed
Relations with professionals and the support team from Clifford House Fostering
Record Keeping
Safe caring practice
Own development, reflections on practice; training and other learning opportunities

The meeting should end with:

- An AGREED ACTION PLAN of who does what and timescales.
- A signed record made by those present.

Copies will be made and returned to the carer.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Training

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the world’s most widely accepted human rights agreement. 191 countries have signed it. It has 54 articles.

These rights are for all people under 18 (Article 1). They apply to everybody without discrimination. (Article 2)
Children / young people have the right to:

1. Protection against discrimination
2. Have your best interests given the most importance when adults make decision about you.
3. Have your rights made a reality by the government.
4. Be given guidance by your parents and family.
5. Life
6. A name and nationality
7. An identity
8. Live with your parents unless this is bad for you
9. Leave any country and go into your own country to be with your parents.
10. Be protected from being kidnapped and taken out of the country.
11. Say what you think and be listened to by adults when they make decisions that affect you.
12. Get information and express what you think, unless it is against other people’s rights.
13. Think what you like and have what religion you want, with parents’ guidance.
14. Meet with others and join or set up clubs, unless it is against other people’s rights.
15. Privacy
16. Get information. Information on media such as radio, newspaper, books, tv, etc should be useful to you and not harmful.
17. Be brought up by your parents if possible.
18. Protection from being hurt, violence, abuse and neglect.
19. Special care and protection, if you can’t live with your parents.
20. Have the best care for you if you are adopted.
21. Special protection and help if you are a refugee.
22. Special care and education to help you develop and lead a full life if you have a disability.
23. The best health possible and to medical care.
24. Have your placement checked regularly if you have to be looked after away from home.
25. Help from government if you are poor or in need.
26. A good enough standard of living for you to develop properly.
27. Education
28. Education which tries to develop your personality and abilities as much as possible and encourages you respect other people’s rights and values.
29. Use your own language and practise your own culture and religion.
30. Play and free time.
31. Protection from work that is bad for your health or education.
32. Be protected from sexual abuse.
33. Not be abducted or sold.
34. Protection from any other kind of exploitation
35. Not be punished in a cruel way or tortured. Not to be put in prison with adults.
36. Not be in an army or fight in a war before you are 15. If you are affected by war you must be protected.
37. Help if you have been hurt, neglected or badly treated.
38. Help in defending yourself, and to have your age taken into account, if you are accused of breaking the law.
39. Any rights in laws in your country or internationally which give you better rights than these.

40. Everybody should know about the rights in the Convention, adults and children, and the government should tell people about them.

Articles 43-54 are about how governments and international organisations will work to give children their rights.

T

Training, Support and Development Standards

The Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards form part of the induction in the role of fostering for you as foster carers. They provide a national minimum benchmark that sets out what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12 to 18 months after being approved.

If you’re a foster carer about to start the TSD standards, or you’d like help completing the workbook, talk to your supervising social worker who will be able to support and guide you. The TSD standards workbook takes you through each section of the standards, and is available in PDF and editable Word formats.

You can present your evidence in a range of ways. The most important thing is that you evidence all of the standards under each of the headings.

At the end of the preparation training for foster carers the TSD standards will be discussed with foster carers and supervising social workers/support workers to develop the philosophy that training and development is an important process and this takes places from the beginning of the journey in preparing to become a foster carer.

At the first annual review foster carers will have completed the TSD standards and a recommendation about future suitability will be made to the fostering panel.

Training

We are really pleased to introduce you to the training and development opportunities available through Clifford House Fostering. This section is designed to (with the support of your Supervising Social Worker) help you understand and choose your learning pathway alongside your fostering career.

Our ethos, approach and commitment to training can be found in our Agency Training Policy.

Whilst fostering is often highly rewarding it can also be complex and challenging. The challenges of care are both diverse and extensive, often requiring a significant developmental journey for child and Foster Carer/s. The foundations of high quality professional foster care are built upon dedicated, committed and passionate people who receive rigorous and robust support and training.
Clifford House Fostering looks forward to welcoming and engaging you in learning environments that are supportive, friendly, and informative and value your ideas and participation. We are dedicated to delivering a comprehensive suite of training that equips you with the skills, knowledge and confidence important in supporting children and young people who will share your family and home.

We recognise that sometimes the prospect of training can seem a little daunting and raise anxiety in adults who perhaps have been away from what they consider formal ‘learning environments’ for some time. We are committed to and confident that our approach will help you feel relaxed, develop confidence and experience learning at your own pace. Often the opportunity to meet and share experiences and stories with other carers can be a real added value and results in learning together in a fun way.

**Our core aims are to:-**

- Offer continuous professional development through training events that are credible, relevant and that connect directly with the fostering task.

- To include you in the development of our training, in forming a partnership that commissions events that reflect their needs, areas of interest and affords opportunities for sector recognised qualifications.

- To keep you updated in relation to legislative and policy changes, new guidance and best practice developments,

- To differentiate the training to reflect diversity, your levels of ability, learning styles and experience.

- To make training accessible and available in different forms including face to face, e learning, additional reading

- To provide you with an individual continuous professional development plan that aligns to their developing fostering career.

- To offer opportunities for individual, shared and group learning in environments that are educative, empowering and value past experience

**To achieve this we will:**

- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by trainers who understand the fostering task. At appropriate times, including weekends and evenings.

- Provide you with other development opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise, such as mentoring, support, further reading and qualification.

- Provide opportunities where you and other Carers can share your views of training and development and contribute to the strategy of the agency on a regular basis. These will include: - evaluation forms, group forums, supervision, Foster Carer reviews or direct contact with the training department.
Pre -Approval Training

You (single applicant) and your partner (joint applicant) will be invited to the Clifford House Fostering 5 day Preparation Training programme. This has been developed in conjunction with the nationally recognised Skills to Foster programme and been made specific to the fostering service of Clifford House.

The programme delivers the first four days prior to the commencement of your skills based fostering assessment (BAAF Form F). Day 5 is undertaken towards the conclusion of the assessment process. This will give you the opportunity to think about what has been important and learned during the first four days and any other additional learning gained through the assessment process. Areas for future skill and knowledge development are often identified at this stage and inform the creation of your personal development pathway. In simple terms what training is going to best assist you and how can this be achieved once approved.

Day 5 of the Preparation Training achieves two main objectives: - the completion of the recording and reporting course (part of the agency core training) and introduction to the TDS Standards.

You will be provided with a reflective tool (In house study pack) which you will have been invited to complete at the conclusion of each session. This captures and evidences your learning against the curriculum objectives. This is mapped directly to the Training & Development Support Standards (TDS) and forms part of your initial evidence for what is called your induction portfolio.

Prior to approval you will have already achieved one of the core training courses and have evidence in place for your induction portfolio as part of the TDS. These are great foundations which together we will build upon through Post Approval Training.

Post Approval Training (The first 12 months)

Having been successfully approved an individual training record will be created for you and where this is a joint Foster Carer household for you both.

Your Induction will take place at your home by your allocated Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and this will be within a maximum of 6 weeks of approval. The TDS standards workbook will be introduced and together with your SSW initial planning for completion can be started. This will be part of your personal development plan and will target the completion of core training.

All newly approved Foster Carers for Clifford House Fostering are required as part of their approval to complete all the core training and the TDS within the first twelve months of
approval. This then becomes the focus of your personal development plan in your first year of fostering.

Core training means topics of learning that Clifford House Fostering has chosen as really valuable and important from the outset to help you with your new role. It helps us demonstrate and obtain a universal standard of knowledge and learning that all our Foster Carers have undertaken and achieved. The core training links closely to the TDS and provides evidence on completion for your portfolio. The chosen topics also reflect legislation & guidance such as the National Minimum Foster Care Standards, accepted best practice and consultation with experienced carers.

The Core Training Topics are:-

- **Safeguarding** 1 day – class (Refresher required every 3 years)
- **First Aid** 2x1/2 days – class (Refresher required every 3 years)
- **Safe care** 10 hours learning – online
- **Valuing Equality and Diversity** – online
- **PRICE** 2 days (Promoting Positive Approaches to Behaviour) – class (Refresher required every 12 months)
- **Supporting Contact** 1 day – class
- **Recording and Report writing** 1 day this will have been completed pre–approval as part of your preparation training.

This training has been mapped to the TDS standards. It will form a central part of your portfolio and it is the agency policy that this training is completed as part of the successful achievement of the TDS Standards. At the end of the first twelve months it is expected that the **TDS Standards and the above core training** is completed.

Where the application is a joint one the expectation of Clifford House Fostering is that both prospective carers achieve the core training element as above. We respect completely the pressures of work and other priorities for partners and that sometimes they do not take a full time role. We will always look at making elements of the core training as accessible as possible through different forms (E learning as an example). Whilst we expect the primary carer to achieve the core training within the first twelve months, there is scope and acceptance this may take longer for a second carer.

We have made this commitment in accordance with guidance and best practice and in recognising the important support role second carers take in the lives and welfare of the children placed. Our commitment is to invest in core elements of learning for both parts of the carer partnership.

**Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD)**

The Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards form part of a Foster Carer’s induction in the role. They provide a national minimum benchmark that sets out what Foster Carers should know, understand and be able to do within the first 12 months after being approved.
There are seven standards to be completed and are underpinned by the Principles and Values Statement. Full explanation and guidance is provided within the workbook which will be provided to you. The TSD Standards are:-

**Standard 1:** Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.

**Standard 2:** Understand your role as a foster carer.

**Standard 3:** Understand health and safety, and healthy caring

**Standard 4:** Know how to communicate effectively

**Standard 5:** Understand the development of children and young people

**Standard 6:** Safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm)

**Standard 7:** Develop yourself

In starting the TSD standards you can expect to receive help and advice in planning your evidence and completing the workbook by your supervising social worker. Additional support is available through workshops (detailed in the training calendar as part of the group forums) and direct support from the Training Manager.

Clifford House Fostering has developed in conjunction with the TSD standards an internal workbook that takes you through each section of the standards, and is available in PDF and editable Word formats. The workbook is a tool to help you plan, gather and record evidence of your learning and development. It will enable you to meet the evidence requirements. All Foster Carers will have a portfolio in which to keep their evidence and are encouraged to add to their portfolio each time they attend training or gain new knowledge.

Where there is a joint application then you have a choice. You could undertake a joint portfolio that includes the full evidence of the primary carer and that which relates to the role taken by the second carer. Alternatively if you wish you can do individual portfolios. Clifford House fostering is happy to assist you in deciding which the best option is and how this can be achieved.

Where there are two full time carers and fostering is the primary role for both, in accordance with guidance and best practice Clifford House Fostering would expect there to be individual portfolios.

Full guidance covering the completion of the standards is provided alongside the workbook and is available in hard or electronic copy. Additional information and guidance can be found at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).
You will be issued with a certificate of completion upon successful completion of the TSD Standards. Our policy is that the Supervising Social Worker signs off the individual standards and these are detailed in the evidence workbook. The Training Manager and or other Managers will sign off all workbooks and sign the certificates.

You will keep your completed portfolio and good practice is to add to this throughout your fostering career. If you decide to go on and do other qualifications evidence you have gathered can be used.

Sometimes we are asked if only the core training can be undertaken in the first year? Our policy response is no this is a minimum expectation and we would welcome additional attendance at training events. We would ask that your Personal Development Plan prioritises core training but if there is the space and capacity to do more we are happy for this expectation to be exceeded.

It is worth remembering that fostering can be very busy and there will be other demands competing for your time such as attendance at meetings, keeping records, transporting children as examples. We want training to fit in with the fostering task and for you to not feel overwhelmed. If you achieve the core training and TDS in your first year you will have done a fantastic job and laid down some excellent foundations.

Your first Foster Carer Review will look at how you have progressed and discuss any challenges or additional areas of support needed. Successful completion will be reflected in the recommendation of the Fostering Panel for your continued terms of approval.

**Non-Completion**

As an organisation and in maintaining the highest standards in training alongside our commitment to you we will always strive to support and assist you in the completion of this timeline. Within this we accept that there may be a minority of Foster Carers whom may need longer than twelve months to complete the standards and core training. This may be for the following situations:-

- Exceptional and unexpected personal circumstances such as bereavement, ill health and personal crisis.
- Difficulties with literacy/language skills
- A significant period of time without placement
- Complex placement issues such as disruption or allegation

This is understandable, although in accordance with best practice we will seek to renegotiate a timeframe for completion. This will involve checking if circumstances can be resolved by looking at different approaches. A proportionate, reasonable and common sense approach will always be taken.
Post Approval Training (what next after 12 months?)

There will be training available for all Foster Carers throughout the year. Following the first annual review you will be expected to continue with your professional development through supervision every month and by attending training. After the first year the Primary Carer is expected to undertake at least 4 workshops in the next 12 months.

The agreed and chosen programme for Foster Carers will be delivered between January and December reflecting the school holiday periods when training will not take place.

In reflecting the Childcare demands on Foster Carers there is a policy commitment to where possible schedule the leaning hours between 10am and 2.30pm. There will always be exceptions to the principle set, reflecting a greater number of learning hours for some courses. Where this is the case there will be advanced warning allowing for planning and the learning hour requirement will be detailed.

In acknowledging the working and personal commitments of Foster Carers especially where this is a Second Foster Carer the training calendar will look to include weekend and evening training opportunities. These will be detailed as such in the training calendar. Our commitment as an agency is to connect the second carer to continuous professional development through a variety of flexible ways that reflect the competing demands on their time.

Learning might be through E learning courses, directed reading, supervision, attendance at group forums and that disseminated back through the primary carer.

The training calendar will be sent out in the first week of November each year to all Foster Carers in electronic copy by email. The calendar of training events will be posted on our website and a hard copy can be made available by the training department at the request of a Foster Carer. All managers and supervising social workers will receive a copy.

The training calendar will detail the date of the course, venue, start and finish time, whether core, supplementary or complementary, any special learning requirements (type of clothing PRICE as an example) details of Trainer/s.
The diagram below details the training pathway for a new Foster Carer.

**Training, Support and Development for Foster Carer/s:** Training pathway for a new Foster Carer.

**Pre-approval: 6 months**

- Foster Carer completes Pre-approval Training-CHF 5Day Preparation (Skills to Foster)
- Gaps in knowledge and skills and initial training needs identified during the assessment.
- Approved as Foster Carers.

**Induction: Within 12 months of approval**

- Supervising Social Worker and Foster Carer agree Personal Development Plan with timescales for completion of training development standards & Core training
- Foster Carer participates in induction and core training. Workbook/Portfolio started
- Foster Carer evidences Standards using Workbook Supervising Social Worker signs off the Workbook.
- Personal Development Plan reviewed and updated at Foster Carers Annual Review.
- Certificate of Successful Completion of Standards
- Operations Manager or Training Manager does final sign off

**Foster Carer Development: Within 2 years of approval**

- Undertakes specialist course and skills development Certificates of completion.
- Evidence of further development and training.
- Units towards Level 3 Diploma or BTEC
The Training Programme

The training programme for the year will include where these have been set details of all 5 day preparation programmes for new Foster Carers. It will detail the core training as referenced above and other Post Approval Training for Foster Carers. It will also include dates where supporting workshops for the TDS Standards are taking place at the end of the Foster Carer’s group forums.

Outside of the core training, the programme can best be understood to deliver a range of relevant topics which are supplementary or complementary.

Supplementary: - Training that updates and informs Foster Carers of changes in policy, legislation, guidance and regulations. An example would be national changes such as the introduction of the New National Minimum Standards Framework or legislative changes in Missing Children from Care.

These can also reflect updates in the changes in the policy of Clifford House Fostering or perhaps changes in the policy of a local authority that will impact directly on practice.

Complementary: - Training that informs, develops and adds value to the direct practice of Foster Carers. This is about the development of awareness, knowledge and skills in your direct work with children, young people and their families. It will include a range of topics. Examples might include: - working with children who present sexualised behaviour, communicating with children, drugs, alcohol and substance misuse, managing allegations, attachment, trauma and resilience.

Some of the training will be delivered internally through the training team and including staff members with specialist knowledge and an area of interest. Other topics will be commissioned externally from individuals and organisations with expertise, knowledge and working experience in their chosen fields.

At times we get opportunities for places on training courses of various local authorities and other providers through our working partnership. Where known in advance these will be denoted in the training calendar. Otherwise they will be advertised in the organisational newsletter (training section) shared with SSW and emailed to Foster Carers.

You can select any training courses you wish and we would suggest this is done through supervision in discussion with your SSW. Areas of interest, issues arising in placement, age range included in your terms of approval, emerging challenges are good indicators of what to choose and include in your personal development plan.

Clifford House Fostering is committed to delivering a comprehensive training programme for all Foster Carers, staff members and managers reflecting The National Minimum Standards, Legislative, policy and best practice frameworks. A Training Needs analysis will be undertaken annually at all levels of the organisation which will inform the programme for the next coming year. This will be undertaken in September (4 week completion) of each year in order that the findings can be used to drive the new programme which will begin again in January.
Evaluation of Training, Learning & Development

Your feedback and interpretation of the training is really important and we want to create every opportunity to hear your views. Every course will have a brief description of the content, learning objectives and suggested audience. The TDS standards covered will be linked.

At the conclusion of each course you will be given a written evaluation form and asked to share their comments on the relevance, learning gained, quality of information and delivery. These will be returned to the training department for consideration and used in future planning and commissioning. An electronic option will also be created.

You will also be given a reflective log to take away and complete for the next scheduled supervision. This will capture the value of learning, consider how it might be used and assist in reflective practice. Every Foster Carer is asked to keep this in their record of progress and achievement folder. This is a positive way of demonstrating and recording your own continuous professional development.

The feedback from our Foster Carers, Children & Young People and Staff members is afforded great value and priority as it is the barometer of whether the learning strategy for the organisation is getting it right. There will be other opportunities to gain direct feedback through supervision, group forums, and organisational newsletter and by directly contacting the training department.

Selection and Booking of Courses & Venues

This section includes details of the process for Foster Carers in the selection and booking of training.

In November of each year you will receive:-

- The training calendar (programme) for the following year
- Description of courses
- Print out (CHARMS) of training record to date. This will identify due dates for refreshers!
- Course nomination form

There will be the option denoted on the training database to have this sent electronically or by hard copy depending upon your individual preference. The Training Administrator will run a mail merge and either email or posted form will be sent out. A copy will automatically go to your Supervising Social Worker inclusive of your training record.

It is recommended that the next supervision is used to discuss and identify training needs, aspirations and areas of interest for the coming year. This will reflect any outstanding core training, required refresher updates, gaps in learning resulting out of placement challenges, development of specialisms, commitment to progression of levels, recommendations of Foster Carer Review and/or Panel as examples.
This creates the personal development plan for you for the next twelve months and is then easy to review progress. The course nomination form is completed and returned to the training administrator either by you or your Supervising Social Worker or can be emailed electronically. It is recommended that both you and the SSW put these dates in their diary and they are detailed in the PDP plan.

The training administrator (TA) will create a register of training for every individual course within the training database. On receipt of the nomination form the TA will place your name against the register of the chosen courses. The TA will also cross reference refresher nominations to check dates of expiry. Where there are minimum participant numbers (example first aid) the TA will create a reserve list.

The Training Manager will assess the requirement for additional course allocation. The Training Manager will monitor course nomination returns in the first six weeks and will check stage of progress with the SSW and provide a written report of any gaps to both the Operations Manager and Managing Director.

7-10 days prior to the course the TA will send a text alert reminder to the Foster Carer that they are booked on to attend the programme. The bi-monthly organisational newsletter will contain information about training and forthcoming events.

We want to make the training environment, welcoming, comfortable, accessible and conducive to a positive learning space. Meeting all the requirements of a diverse and geographically spaced Foster Carer base is always going to be a challenge. As the service grows and develops it may be easier to localise the training in clusters on occasions.

Presently we will provide the courses at two central venues; head office (training room) in Leominster and the other at Basepoint in Bromsgrove.

All half day courses will provide light refreshments (coffee, tea, biscuits) full days will include a light lunch (sandwiches).

Unable to attend?

We afford a top priority to your learning and development for a host of important reasons. This can be costly but will receive the required investment to achieve an outstanding approach and outcomes. Achieving 100% attendance across our Foster Carer base is a key objective of the training strategy and policy.

Non attendance by Foster Carer/s can be very costly and detract from an opportunity for someone else to benefit. There will be occasions when the organisation will have to take the decision to cancel courses due to unforeseen circumstances. This will always be a last resort and in doing so the training dept will provide as full as notice as possible, offer a clear rational and identify a replacement date as soon as is practicable.

It is an expectation of you that if you are unable to attend then notify the training dept as soon as is practicable. The TA will enter this on the register of the course and on the individual training record detailing the reason. If there is a reserve list the TA
might with time be able to offer the place to someone else. The course register will then be amended.

In your protection and best interests it is the policy of the organisation to track non attendance and cancellations and in the first instance inform the SSW. This will then be explored through supervision and remedial action taken.

As an organisation and in maintaining the highest standards in training in partnership together we will always strive to assist in the completion of your PDP. If there is a pattern of cancellation and non attendance resulting in issues of compliance with expectations agreed in the PDP, contained in the training policy, Foster Care Agreement, National Minimum Standards, terms of approval as examples then the following action will be followed:-

Within this we accept that there may be legitimate circumstances when Foster Carers may not be able to meet all the requirements of their PDP. This may be for the following situations:-

- Exceptional and unexpected personal circumstances such as bereavement, ill health and personal crisis.
- Complex placement issues such as disruption or allegation
- Suspension following allegations

This is understandable, although in accordance with best practice we will seek to renegotiate the timescales for completion of the PDP. This will involve checking if circumstances can be resolved and by looking at alternative avenues of support. A proportionate, reasonable and common sense approach will always be taken.

Where a Foster Carer is unable to complete areas of the PDP the following process is followed:-

- Supervising Social Worker discusses the circumstances with the Operations Manager.
- A brief report detailing the circumstances and a copy of the personal development plan is sent to the Operations manager. The PDP is adjusted to include new proposals, actions, and timescales for completion.
- Supervising Social Worker supports and monitors completion of the revised PDP.
- If the challenges remain unresolved then a review may be brought back to the fostering panel to consider implications for terms of approval and plan of resolution.
Certification and Training Records

On the day of the training the TA will print a register of attendance. It is an expectation that you sign the register of attendance and that this is done to evidence attendance. The register is returned by the course leader to the training department.

Where the course is being delivered internally by Clifford House Fostering, then certification will normally be issued to you along with an evaluation form and reflective log at the conclusion of the session. It is recommended that certificates and reflective logs are kept as part of your CPD folder.

On receipt of the register, the TA will update all the individual training records on the (CHARMS database) This will include completion, non completion (not completed the required learning hours example had to leave first aid an hour early) apologies or where no apologies. If there is a refresher requirement this will be added to your record.

On the day of the training once the register is known the TA will email all SSW with Foster Carers booked to attend details where this did not occur in order that it can be picked up in supervision.

A monthly report of all courses and register of attendance is emailed by the TA to the Training Manager, Operations Manager and Managing Director as part on quality assurance compliance.

Advancement and Progression

Clifford House Fostering is committed to your advancement and reward for doing so accordingly. We have created a pathway of progression moving through levels 1 to 2. We believe this is fair, equitable and rewards all Foster Carers for evidencing their often outstanding contribution to the lives of children and young people and to the advancement of the service. Progression through the levels is directly linked to training and detailed as follows:-

Within the first year of approval Foster Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards and core training as detailed previously. This will contribute to the Foster Carer’s first annual review at the Fostering Panel.

Following the first annual review Foster Carers are expected to engage in the continued professional development through supervision every month and by attending training. After the first year Foster Carers are expected to undertake at least 4 training events within the following twelve months. To progress to level 2 on the payment for skills scheme, Foster Carers are expected to have chosen their ‘specialism’ in fostering and be prepared to undertake specific training such as the level 3 Diploma, Advanced Apprenticeship or other qualifications to aid knowledge.
Qualifications & further Learning

As part of a commitment to the continuation of continuous professional development for our Foster Carers Clifford House Fostering will offer and fund opportunities for further learning and qualification.

We aim to support the primary Foster Carer of each household with achieving the **Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce** (replacing NVQ 3 Caring for Children and Young People)

This is a nationally recognised qualification in the field of childcare which splits into two pathways Early Learning & Childcare (fostering route) and Social Care. Vocational in nature this can be completed at your own pace up to 14months. It is made up of some mandatory units and optional choices allowing you to study areas of interest. We commission the programme through Ludlow and Worcester College and the training and support is at a local level to you.

This can be also be achieved through **An Advanced Apprenticeship Children's Care and Learning Development**. This is a slightly longer qualification 18 -24 months comprising additional certification.

Either option is open to all Foster Carers within 2 years of first approval but requires completion of the TDS standards, all core training and a record of completion of the required number of additional courses. This is something that can be discussed through supervision and form part of your PDP.

We are open to other options an example being the **BTEC Level 3 Advanced skills for Foster Carers** if this is determined to be a more effective learning and qualification pathway. Beyond level 3 qualifications for those Foster Carers who are committed and can demonstrate they meet the entry requirements Clifford House Fostering will consider the funding or co funding of higher awards.

An example might be the **BTEC Level 4 Advanced Practice in Working with Traumatised Children**, an opportunity to undertake a practice based E learning qualification over two years exploring the approaches and techniques involved in a therapeutic based approach to parenting.

The **Level 5 Diploma**, a new qualification which sits on the QCF (Qualifications Credit Framework) at under graduate level. This can be undertaken through the Open University or through other routes

There should never be a ceiling to CPD and there may be Foster Carers who would like to continue on their learning and qualification. The training policy will set out a pathway that enables requests and applications to be considered on individual merits.

Short Courses

In developing the service, there will be a number of opportunities to do short based courses; some accredited others certificated in a number of areas. Examples include an online diploma in Understanding and Working with Autism through Birmingham
University, a certification in the field of domestic abuse (modular), through the Walsall Domestic Violence Centre.

These might be valuable ways of increasing your knowledge and specialism inclusive of recognised certification, whilst providing a challenging, informative and dynamic learning experience.

**Additional Resources/information portal**

In supporting learning and development Clifford House Fostering have made a variety of learning resources available to support the training courses and develop your skills and understanding. These will include books, articles, DVD’S/Videos and useful websites. Some examples include:

- A child’s journey through placement,
- Fostering attachment
- Attachment, trauma and resilience
- Working with anger and young people,
- Care Stories,
- Life Story work- A practical guide to helping children understand their past,
- Helping children to improve communication skills

These are available for loan from the training department and provide both pre-reading for courses and more detailed research.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our [Fostering policies](#) (Following this link will take you to the training section)

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

From time to time placements of children who have entered the UK as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children will be made with foster carers all over the UK.

Children who have been given this status may have entered the UK and have no contact with anyone that they know, or have any parent or family member living in the UK.

As a foster carer, if you have a child placed with you in this situation the placement plan and future reviews will be the place which will help you understand the plan for the child and what you can do to help support the child in placement to meet their own cultural and ethical needs.

Your supervising social worker or support worker can help you to develop a better understanding of the circumstances and what support can be accessed for both you and the child.
Clifford House Fostering will do its best to meet the young person's cultural and religious needs by careful matching. The agency should not assume that the UASC wants to be placed with a family of their culture as this is not always the case, however the majority feel more secure placed with families that speak their language and every effort will be made to ensure this occurs. If the young person is placed with foster carers of differing beliefs, the agency will ensure the foster carers are well informed of what is required of them to meet the young person's needs. With regards to religious needs, all key elements of the UASC's faith should be taking into account when placing a child. For example, foster carers with indoor pets such as cats or dogs may not be appropriate for an Islamic young person as pets are considered unclean.

A UASC may have family or friends already in the UK, in this instance, the Agency will do its best to ensure the young person is placed within travelling distance to them and assist them with accessing and maintaining their support.

The Agency will ensure foster carers are given accurate information about the young person's ethnic, cultural and religious and dietary needs. In addition, any information regarding the young person's experience prior to departure and journey to the UK will be given if known. The Agency will ensure an interpreter is available to the young person if required when meeting the foster carers so both the young person and the foster carers can ensure all their questions and answers and fully understood.

The details of this policy can be accessed from our Fostering policies (Following this link will take you to the Unaccompanied Asylum seeker section).

**Unannounced Visits**

In addition to planned regular supervision meetings with you as foster carers, your supervising social workers or support workers will also carry out occasional unannounced visits, at least twice a year. The purpose of these is to get a fuller picture about how things are for you the foster carers, your family and the children / young people in your care. A record of these visits will be kept, and this information will form part of the foster carers’ review.

**Usual Fostering Limits**

The law says that, generally speaking, all foster carers should not look after more than three children unless they are all from the same family. This means that foster carers could look after a group of four brothers and sisters, but not three siblings and one other child. It is thought that most families cannot cope with the demands of more than three unrelated children at once, and indeed many families are only approved for one or two children.
There are certain specific situations in which carers can care for more than three children; for example, when the child in need of placement already knows the carers, or when those carers are ideally placed to meet that particular child’s needs. Such a situation would be fully discussed with the carers, and if it were decided to agree to them caring for four or more children a certificate exempting them from the usual fostering limit would be issued by the placing Local Authority.

V

Valuing Diversity

We are all unique and different. Clifford House Fostering aims to provide a fostering service that values this diversity and promotes equality. Matching placements to the child / young person’s needs is part of this process.

As foster carers you need to be able to recognise and meet the needs of the child / young person placed with you in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

Social Workers and foster carers need to work together to make sure that a child / young person’s feelings of self worth and of confidence are supported and helped to develop.

As foster carers will be expected to undertake diversity training at least once every three years as part the requirement for you to understand that every child is unique and will have their own set of needs.

Once a child is placed with you, the placement plan will identify and specific diversity needs of the child and you can talk about this further with your supervising social worker or support work.

W

Whistle Blowing

As foster carers working with looked after children you may consider that there might be something seriously wrong with the care and support a child placed at Clifford House Fostering is receiving or a service which you or another foster carer is receiving. Such concerns may not appear to come under the Complaints Procedure which is normally used to complain about unfair processes or inappropriate behaviour by staff. You may not feel able to express concerns because speaking up increase the possible risk of harm. You may also fear harassment, victimisation or that the future placement of children with you could be jeopardised. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may be just a suspicion of malpractice.
Clifford House Fostering is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty and accountability. In line with that commitment as foster carers you are encouraged to voice any serious concerns you may have. This Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable you as foster carers to raise such concerns openly, without fear of reprisals.

**Aims and scope of this policy**

This policy aims to:

- provide avenues for you to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the response, and reassure you that you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing in good faith.

There is an existing Complaints Procedure, which enable you to make complaints about inappropriate staff behaviour towards you and raise issues about a child or children placed with you. This whistleblowing policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of these procedures.

That concern may be about something that:

- is unlawful or illegal; or
- is a breach of a legal duty delegated by the LA to Clifford House Fostering; or
- is a miscarriage of justice; or
- against the Clifford House Fostering policies
- falls below established standards or practice or
- amounts to improper conduct; or
- endangers the health and safety of any person; or
- attempts to conceal any of the above

**Safeguards**

**Harassment or victimisation**

Clifford House Fostering recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. Clifford House Fostering will not tolerate harassment, bullying or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

This does not mean that if you are already the subject of investigation regarding allegations concerning child protection or standards of care, that those procedures will be halted as a result of your whistleblowing.

**Confidentiality**

Initially, confidentiality can be guaranteed and Clifford House Fostering will do its best to protect your identity throughout any investigation (when you raise a concern and do not want your name to be disclosed). It must be appreciated however that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by you may be required as part of the evidence.
Anonymous allegations
This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they will be considered at the discretion of the Council.

In exercising the discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

Untrue allegations
If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make malicious or vexatious allegations, a review of your approval as a carer may occur.

How to raise a concern
As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your supervising social worker or their manager. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the malpractice. If you consider it inappropriate to raise concerns with these support staff, you may choose to raise concerns with senior management instead.

Concerns are better raised in writing. You are invited to set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. If you do not feel able to put your concern in writing, you can telephone or meet the appropriate supervising social worker, support worker, or manager. They will either read to you or show you the written record of your conversation so that you may confirm that the details of your concern are fully and properly recorded.

The earlier you express the concern, the easier it is to take action. Although you are not expected to prove the truth of the allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern.

You may invite the Fostering Network to raise a matter on your behalf, who can be contacted at

87 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8HA.

Tel: 020 7620 6400
How Clifford House Fostering will respond

The action taken by Clifford House Fostering will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:

- be investigated internally
- be referred to the Police
- be referred to the placing and host local authority
- be referred to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspectorate
- form the subject of an independent inquiry.

In order to protect individuals, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

Within ten working days of a concern being received, Clifford House Fostering will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place, and if not, why not
- telling you whether this matter will remain within the Clifford House Agency for investigating, or whether referrals have been made externally

The amount of any contact between the person considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

When any meeting is arranged, you have the right if you so wish to be accompanied by a Fostering Network representative or a friend who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

Clifford House Fostering will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in any form of proceedings, Clifford House will advise you about the procedure, which is likely to form part of a foster carer review.

Clifford House Fostering accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Therefore, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.
How the matter can be taken further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue to raise concerns within the Clifford House Fostering. We hope you will be satisfied. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside of the agency, the following are possible contact points:

- Fostering Network
- Ofsted
- The Local Children’s Safeguarding Board in your area
- The Police.

If you do take the matter outside of Clifford House Fostering, you need to ensure that you do not disclose confidential information. Check with your supervising social worker or support worker before speaking to any person or organisation outside of Clifford House about what information you cannot disclose because of its confidentiality.