

Appendix 2: Who informs who and when? Important questions for foster carers who are authorised to take decisions and undertake key tasks

Everyone has a responsibility to make the Placement Plan work as well as possible in order to ensure the child in placement has increased opportunities to have a normal life. It can, however, be helpful for foster carers to have some key questions ready to make absolutely sure that they and the social workers and parents are communicating clearly about the basis of decisions and their expectations of each other.

Communication is at the heart of good practice, and this includes delegated authority. It is imperative that parents feel as fully involved as possible in their child's life and the planning process. As well as being a legal duty, it increases the chances of building confidence and trust with foster carers and social workers and helps parents to think about delegated authority in a way that meets the needs of their child without them feeling disempowered or side lined. Sometimes foster carers can talk directly to parents to keep them up to date and to advise them of actions they have undertaken on their behalf. In other situations, parents may need to receive information about their child's care and welfare from the social worker, who needs to be kept informed of developments by the foster carer.

Communication is also crucial in order to build confidence and trust between the professionals. There may be agreement about what responsibilities are delegated to foster carers, but there can still be scope for misunderstandings about who is informed about what has taken place and when. It is easy to assume that all parties have the same expectations in relation to this and only find out later, when it has become a problem that they did not.

The pressures of time also mean that some actions and decisions, and the basis upon which these are made, are not always as clear as they need to be. Foster carers and social workers have a responsibility to ensure that there is clarity of understanding. Finally, things rarely run to plan: problems crop up at the worst moment; the foster carer needs something resolved quickly; the social worker is ill; the manager is out. What is in place to deal with this scenario and what principles should guide the foster carer in making 'the best possible' decision in the circumstances?

Assumptions are risky things to have. Checking what another person is expecting of us, exactly what has been agreed (and why), is rarely wasted effort. What follows are some questions which may help foster carers in these situations.

1. Expectations regarding how foster carers involve parents in their fostered child's life

How can the fostered child's parents receive the information that they want from me between reviews about how I am caring for their child/making everyday decisions?

- directly or via the social worker
- notes
- phone calls/texts/email
- a diary
- postcards

2. Expectations about when foster carers should communicate with social workers or parents over decisions they have taken.

Is this consent, decision or task something I need to advise the social worker/parent/out-of-hours service about:

- Immediately – as soon as I have made it?
- Next time I see them?
- At the next review when the Placement Plan is reviewed as part of the Care Plan?
- I just record that it has happened.

3. Expectations about what informs social workers decisions

Is the social worker's advice about a consent or decision based upon:

- The legal position?
- Departmental policy and procedure?
- A risk assessment?
- A discussion with a manager or IRO?
- A personal view?

Foster carers can use the *Decision Support Tool* to record notes and questions about these things to discuss with their fostered child's social worker or in reviews.