

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Service

Bedroom Sharing Policy

The aim of the Fostering Service is to meet the Best Practice principle of enabling every child in foster care to have the option of their own bedroom, and our foster carer recruitment strategy seeks to ensure that sufficient numbers and variety of carers are recruited to meet this aim.

Legal Framework

This policy is based on the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS), and the Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 prescribe a “usual fostering limit” for foster carers of three (unrelated) children, (the limit does not apply if the children are siblings). The schedule also makes provision for this limit to be exceeded under an “exemption” when specified factors have been considered and satisfied. However, neither the Act nor the Schedule makes any requirement concerning the number of bedrooms to be available in order for the limit to apply, or for an exemption to the limit to be granted.

Neither The Fostering Services Regulations 2011, nor the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 - both of which now govern the placement of children in foster care - specify the requirements as to the bedroom accommodation to be available in relation to the approval terms of the foster carer. However, the statutory guidance to the latter regulations emphasizes the general principle that, in any placement decision:

“.. the Authority must be satisfied that the placement with foster carers is the best way of meeting their duty under Section 22 (of the 1989 Act)... and that the specific placement is the most appropriate, having regard to all the circumstances. In choosing the most appropriate placement, authorities can face a difficult task in ensuring that all the assessed needs of the child can be met. There are often practical limitations on choice which may mean that the ideal placement may not be available.”

Standard 10.6 of the Fostering Services - National Minimum Standards identifies that In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child’s responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

As a general principle, no applications will be accepted from prospective carers for children above school age who do not have a spare bedroom available for foster children. Those enquiring to foster if seeking to care for children over the age of 2 years old must ensure there is a bedroom space available.

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Children entering new foster care placements should be appropriately matched with a placement that has appropriate bedroom space taking into account the age and needs of the child.

Children in placement should have adequate privacy and bedroom space, to preserve dignity and provision for the child to have space to keep their possessions.

Risk assessments must be considered when making an appropriate match with the placement to ensure bedroom sharing is appropriate and does not hinder the child's safety and well-being.

Babies under 6 months of age should sleep in a cot in the foster carer's bedroom.

Unrelated children over 3 years old will not share a bedroom unless in exceptional circumstances and a written risk assessment is completed and approved as set out below in Section 2, Risk Assessment.

Children over the age of 3 years will not share a bedroom with a child of the opposite sex.

Any new applicants must have at least one spare bedroom for 1 child or 2 siblings to share.

Babies and infants up to age 2 years may share the foster carers bedroom where appropriate.

Risk Assessment

Siblings and close relative children over 3 years old may only share a bedroom together, where there is a written risk assessment agreed by the Fostering Manager. The risk assessment must have regard to the following factors:

Assessment of the risks presented in sharing;

The management of privacy;

Ensuring adequate personal space;

The views of the children's Social Workers and parents;

The wishes and feelings of the children concerned must be recorded and considered.

Any new applicants must have bedroom space compatible with the above.

The department aims to fulfil its responsibilities under the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards for foster care (2011) namely:

To ensure foster carer homes can comfortably accommodate all who live there including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child;

To ensure that where possible each child over the age of three has their own bedroom;

To ensure that before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour,

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the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

Matching

Social Workers should demonstrate consultation with existing children in placement, and consideration of risk assessment when placing a child in a new foster placement especially if it is expected that a child will be sharing a bedroom;

Forward planning needs to be incorporated at the point of agreeing a placement in terms of what will happen when a child requires their own bedroom, and considering whether a foster carer has sufficient bedroom space in the medium term future. This will prevent unnecessary moves for the child accommodated by the foster carer.

Risk assessment will take place at the point of placement referral and as part of the matching process and will be recorded in the Placement Plan documents;

Issues to be considered include:

1. Age and gender of the children sharing;
2. Sleeping arrangements, bunk beds* etc;
3. Relationships with other children in the placement;
4. Specific needs of the child sharing a room i.e. enuresis, children waking in the night, requiring the light on etc;
5. Sexualised behaviour of the child being placed and the children in the placement;
6. The provision in placement for privacy and adequate personal space including storage, with special consideration being given to a child in adolescence.

Care of Babies Under the Age of 6 Months

At no point should a baby sleep in the foster carer's bed;

Bedroom provision should be anticipated in advance of when the child is ready to move into a bedroom of its own.

Sibling Groups

Sibling Groups or close relatives where all children are under the age of 3 years may be assessed, for sharing a bedroom together or over three where an authorised risk assessment has been completed;

After the age of 3 years old only same sex sibling or close relatives may be risk assessed for sharing a bedroom.

Bunk Beds

Bunk beds need special consideration, as they do not always allow for privacy for the child. Bunk beds should be avoided if the child experiences enuresis, and if possible should only be used if

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children using them have other areas in the placement that allow for privacy and the children are siblings. Bunk beds should also be safe given the age and mobility of the children. The CoramBAAF health and safety checklist states: *Upper bunk beds have secure safety rails and ladders, and are not being used for children under the age of six*.

Family Holidays

We positively encourage carers to include their foster children in family holidays. The same principles as outlined above should however still apply – the planned holiday and proposed sleeping arrangements should be discussed in advance with the child/ren's social worker(s) and carer's supervising social worker, and a written risk assessment prepared. The same expectations of the carers in terms of safe care practices will of course still apply, and indeed extra vigilance around the sleeping arrangements during the holiday may be necessary.

Where satisfactory (or affordable) arrangements cannot be made to ensure the safety and well-being of all the children involved in the holiday arrangements, it may be necessary to make alternative care arrangements for the foster child, for the duration of the carer's family holiday.