

Swindon Borough Council

Fostering Service

Holiday Guidance for Foster Carers

Introduction

It is required for carers to notify their Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker when they are considering taking a child on holiday, before they inform the child or confirm the holiday booking. This is for both for holidays within U.K. as well as holidays abroad. It is important that details of the intended holiday are given to Children's Services to enable them to record the information. Details of the trip away are required, in the event of the local authority needing to contact the carers/child during their trip away.

It is important that foster carers consider how well they know the child and how long the child has been in placement before taking them on holiday. Foster carers should consider whether they could manage any potential problems in a foreign country or whether this would be more manageable on a UK holiday. Foster carers are requested to give the local authority as much notice as possible, to enable permission to be sought and passports obtained.

For either UK or abroad holidays, foster carers should carry a letter confirming their status as SBC foster carers and that the holiday has been agreed. For those carers who regularly take caravan holidays in the UK it is suggested that this is discussed/agreed at the initial placement meeting.

Individual needs of child/risk assessment

Each child's individual needs should be assessed in conjunction with the Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker prior to going on holiday in order to risk assess and meet individual needs.

Holidays Abroad

Permission must be sought from the child's Social Worker and those who share parental responsibility, ahead of a holiday booking being made. A letter will be required giving permission from the appropriate manager (usually Agency Decision Maker or Service Manager) to confirm when and where the children are going to be on each day of the holiday. Please note, a child/young person on a Care Order, cannot be taken out of the U.K. for more than a month without the consent of everyone with parental responsibility or permission from the court.

Holiday Insurance

Foster carers need to ensure appropriate holiday insurance cover is in place for children looked after when they are travelling abroad.

Foreign Office Advice

Foster carers should seek advice from the foreign office around current guidelines and advice around potential dangers and risks and if vaccinations are required for the trip. The fostering service encourages carers to follow the advice from the foreign office

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Holiday Clubs

If a child looked after is not allowed to participate in activities when other children of a similar age, understanding and ability can, it could cause distress. When considering the use of holiday clubs, foster carers should be aware that there is an expectation for them to remain within the vicinity to ensure child/young person is safe. Foster carers are reminded not to use this as a babysitting service e.g. going off site elsewhere and leaving child in the care of holiday club staff for long protracted periods. It is the responsibility of the Foster carers to ensure that any child or young person is appropriately supervised at all times whilst on the holiday.

Child/Young Person going missing

Foster carers should ensure they have all emergency contact numbers for both within the UK and the country they are visiting, such as local police, British Consulate and Swindon's Emergency Duty Team.

Activities

Foster carers must take responsibility, for allowing children to participate in activities whilst on holiday. The expectations for foster carers around activities are the same as they would be in their local area. Foster carers are expected find out all of the information regarding the activity and risk assess accordingly, determining whether the activity is safe for the child to complete.

Bedrooms

In respect of rooms, it is thought to be safer, that carers and children share a family room than a child occupying a room of their own. This is dependent on the layout of the accommodation, as well as child's age, understanding, maturity along with their experiences. Many establishments will not allow young people under the age of 16/18 to occupy a room of their own.

Room sharing would require a risk assessment being undertaken. All children must have their own bed, under no circumstances should there be any bed sharing between children/adults. It is good practice to include the foster carers own children/grandchildren in this.

A revised safe care plan to cover the time of the holiday needs to be carried out and adhered to at all times. It is suggested that dressing and undressing is to take place in the bathroom and appropriate clothing to be worn at all times. In relation to children looked after who have a history of sexual abuse, sexualised behaviour or who have made allegations in the past, may be deemed too much of a risk to share a bedroom. Decisions about the suitability of such a holiday for the family/child (ren), will need to be made on a case by case basis.

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A risk assessment is required, based upon the individual needs of the child and the foster carer's circumstances. This will be completed through discussions and agreement with the Supervising Social Worker, child's Social Worker and the foster carer.

A conclusion may be that it is too great a risk to allow a carer(s) on their own, to share a bedroom with a child(ren) on holiday

Supervision of children

Child/baby listening service, or the equivalent offered by a holiday provider, must not be used as a baby sitting service. Children must be appropriately supervised by an adult at all times. No child/young person should be left in an apartment unattended at any time.

Swimming in a pool or in the sea

Children under the age of 11 years should not be left unattended by an adult, in a swimming pool or within the sea. This is regardless of whether they are a competent swimmer or not. The foster carer needs to be satisfied that suitable supervision/monitoring are offered to all young people regardless of age depending on the child's needs.

In relation to access to the sea, it is the carer's responsibility to advise/assess, as to the suitability to access the sea at any given time. This is after taking into account the local safe bathing instructions and guidance. This applies to children/young people of all ages.

Caravans and Camping Holidays

Foster carers who own caravans or tents and use them on a regular basis.

Foster carers will need to review safe care arrangements, paying particular attention to sleeping arrangements. A safe care plan should be drawn up by the foster carer to cover the specific holiday situation, and shared with their Supervising Social Worker. A health and safety risk assessment document should also be completed by the foster carer in relation to the caravan/tent, and shared with the Supervising Social Worker.

If foster carers have a static caravan then such details as site details, pitch number and emergency land line details should be made available in the event of emergencies or if EDS are required to make contact with the carer(s).

A holiday in a caravan/tent not owned by the carers

Ahead of the holiday commencing, carers should request a copy of the layout of the caravan. This will enable carers to plan/risk assess accordingly around sleeping arrangements, in partnership with their Supervising Social Worker and the child(ren)'s Social Worker. All children must have their own beds and risk assessments to be completed on any potential bedroom sharing. Please note, it is the responsibility of the foster carer to complete the safe care plan and health and safety risk assessment, and to share with and discuss with their Supervising Social Worker. Where possible, the Supervising Social Worker should see the caravan, although this will not always be possible due to geographical location.

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Emergency holiday packs

It is required that foster carers should take photocopies of passports, medical consent forms, emergency contact numbers etc. with them, in the event that original copies are lost.

Complacency on Holidays

It is expected that foster carers should not “let their guard down” or “let safe care practices slip”, whilst on holiday, the usual high levels of care our children looked after whilst in their foster placements, should continue whilst on holiday. Children should never be entrusted to any adults that they or their carers happen to meet on holiday for any reason. It is expected that carers should moderate their alcohol consumption on holiday, as this can impair judgement and reduce their ability to keep themselves and children in their care safe. Children under 18 years must never be given any alcohol.

Attendance of Looked After Children at school

Children must not be taken on holiday during term time. It is well documented that the average educational achievements of looked after children fall behind those of other children who are not in the care system. They therefore need the best possible and fullest experience at school to reduce the disadvantage they have already experienced in their lives.

Swindon Borough Council takes a robust line to avoid looked after children missing days or weeks of term to go on holiday. There are legitimate reasons why a child may need to be out of school on occasion, these include medical appointments, assessments by different professionals, organised school trips, contact if it is unavoidable, family crises necessitating the foster child travelling away from the foster home with the foster carers, the child being fixed-term or permanently excluded from school, and so on.

Although the days at the end of term may seem less important to parents and carers, they are often a time when children and young people can have a more informal experience of school, which is often very positive. Equally, the beginning of the school year is an important time for children. There are also some key times for children such as years 10 and 11 when they are preparing for examinations, when attendance at school is highly important.