

**Swindon Borough Council**  
**Fostering Service**  
**Respite Foster Care Guidance and Procedures**

**Introduction and Legal Framework**

In Swindon, foster carers are entitled to up to 14 days break entitlement a year. This provision is given to allow carers to have a break and can be particularly important when caring for children and young people with very complex needs. It may also provide an opportunity for foster carers to have time with their own family, especially if they have their own children still living in the household. Although this provision is available to foster carers and can be an important support tool, it is recognised that moving homes for children and young people can be disruptive and may leave them with a feeling of being left out of the family and many foster carers choose not to take their break entitlement for this reason. The aim of this document is to provide guidance and procedures to ensure that carers do feel able to have a break, should they wish to, but also ensuring that this is arranged in a way that is child focussed.

Some children and young people from Swindon are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). It is our expectation that the philosophy of this document will also be used when considering respite arrangements in these situations. The Supervising Social Worker from the IFA will need to plan and liaise with the child or young person's social worker and IRO in the same way and any decisions regarding respite should be child centred.

**Definitions**

Respite Care

Carer to carer respite fostering is when children and young people who are looked after by foster carers, have a temporary stay with other foster carers.

Carer to carer respite fostering will sometimes be planned respite that is in response to the high care needs of the child or young person. This may include, for example, disabled children and young people or children and young people who present with behaviour that challenges. In these circumstances the respite is put in place to sustain the foster placement and prevent the child or young person experiencing the trauma of a placement breakdown.

Carer to carer respite will sometimes be provided in an emergency. Emergencies may include the foster carer temporarily being unable to look after the children or young people in their care due to their own poor health or other family emergencies. It may also be provided if the foster placement is at risk of breakdown due to complex needs of the child or young person.

As already stated, Swindon foster carers are entitled to up to 14 days break entitlement a year. During a respite period the main carer will not receive the fostering allowance but will receive the skills payment for a maximum of 14 nights.

The calendar year for respite runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> March and is calculated on a pro-rata basis for the time the child/young person is in placement.

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Therefore, if the child has been living with the carers for a year then the allowance will be 14 nights; if the child has been living with the carers for six months the allowance will be seven nights.

Respite cannot be carried over to the following year and relates to the length of time a child is placed in each year.

**Tax**

Foster carers are classed as self-employed and as such must register with HMRC and complete their own tax returns. Guidance on how to complete a self-assessment is available through Fostering Network.

**Back-up Carers**

Foster carers are encouraged to consider their own network of family and friends who may be able to support them in their role of fostering and be able to look after children in foster care to enable the foster carer to have a break. The use of a back-up carer enables the foster child to stay within the foster carer's own network, akin to an arrangement a 'good parent' might make for a birth child. In such circumstances the substantive approved foster carer(s) retains responsibility for the child(ren) during the period of care when they are being looked after by the back-up carers. The substantive foster carer(s) must be available in an emergency and be contactable on the telephone, in line with the expectations made of good parents. The back-up carer does not need to be approved as a foster carer to provide this. Paragraph 3.23 of the Fostering Statutory Guidance 2011 states *"There is no requirement that where a looked after child visits or spends a holiday with their foster carer's friends or relative that the individual must be approved as a local authority foster carer, as the child will remain formally placed with their usual foster carers"*.

If foster carers are arranging for a child or young person to stay with their back up carers overnight they should still inform the Supervising Social Worker and Social Worker of the child so they are aware that the child is away from the home overnight. If this is arranged in an emergency then the Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker should be informed as soon as possible.

If foster carers are caring for children who have complex health needs that require specialist health care training, the back-up carer should also have this training before the child or young person stays with them.

**Other alternatives to respite care**

Foster carers should also be encouraged to consider other options which may allow for them to have a break without the child or young person feeling like they are being 'sent' to an alternative home. There may be options of residential holidays – which may be following an interest the child or young person already has e.g. activity holidays or holidays through organisations that they are already involved in e.g. cadets.

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**Pre-planning for Respite - Assessment Process**

Respite care should be discussed during the assessment and approval process as a foster carer. This should include discussion about the use of back-up carers and whether there are people who could care for the child if there was an emergency in the fostering household. The discussion should also include whether there are potential back-up carers who would be prepared to have children and young people go and stay with them if, for example, the carers go on holiday.

This information would be included in the Form F but should also be on the Case Summary of the carer's file to be available if there was an emergency and the Emergency Duty Service became involved and needed to access the information quickly.

**Home Finding**

Home Finding officers should ensure that children are not matched to carers when a foster carer has an imminent holiday planned which the child would not be able to participate in. If the foster carer is going on holiday and is prepared to take the child/young person with them then there needs to be discussion as to whether it is appropriate for the child. If it is appropriate, then the child or young person's views should be sought and also that of the parent or anyone else with parental responsibility. This should be discussed fully and confirmed **before** agreement to the match to prevent a placement being made and then a further change of foster home required due to arrangements for holiday not working out.

When regular respite is identified and agreed at the point of placement this should be recorded on Care Director and also in the Placement Plan which becomes part of the care plan for the child. This should not be changed due to any changes in social worker or teams. Any changes that are made to this arrangement should be agreed with the IRO and consideration should be given to supporting the placement and not putting the placement at risk. The foster carers should be consulted and must be told of any changes and the reasons for the change.

The use of respite care should be child focused and there are some situations when respite may not be appropriate. This includes the following:

- Any children placed who are under 5 years old;
- Children and young people where there are particular attachment difficulties;
- Bridging to adoption placements.

When making such placements the Supervising Social Worker must be clear with the foster carer that this is the expectation unless there are exceptional circumstances.

There may also be situations where a child or young person may request respite away from their carer and this should be carefully considered alongside the reasons for the request.

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**Delegated Authority**

Delegated Authority should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting for the child or young person's permanent home. It is recommended that at this meeting respite care is discussed and agreement is sought from all relevant parties for when/if the child or young person goes to stay with another carer.

**Process for arranging Respite Care**

The request for respite may come from different forums. It may be agreed as part of an initial agreement for the placement; it may be agreed as part of a support plan from a Placement Stability Meeting; it may be a planned break for the foster carer; or it could be an emergency situation. The basic principal is the sooner the request is made the better it will be for all concerned.

Some foster carers when planning for their break may consult with another foster carer whom they use for respite and who is known to the children. We do not wish to stop this happening as it means that the foster carer is likely to be able to arrange their holiday at a time when it fits in with the other carer this is likely to be in the best interests of the child or young person. However, although these preliminary discussions can be useful it is not a means for formally agreeing the respite and the following procedure should be followed:

1. The Supervising Social Worker needs to be aware of the request. In most circumstances the foster carer will be the person to inform the Supervising Social Worker. If respite is agreed via another forum then it should be agreed at that meeting, if the Supervising Social Worker is not present, who is responsible for telling the Supervising Social Worker;
2. The Supervising Social Worker should then contact the Social Worker and the IRO for the child and seek out their agreement for the respite. If the request is regular respite, this is to be presented at the next available Care and Resource Panel (CRP);
3. Supervising Social Worker to complete a respite information checklist (Appendix 1). This should then be uploaded onto the child's and the foster carer's Care Director record. The Supervising Social Worker is responsible for finding the respite placement, with support from the Fostering Team. They should also update the foster carer availability list so the respite arrangement is considered in relation to any future planned placements;
4. The decision to agree the respite must be with the child's Social Worker/Team Manager or Duty Social Worker. If the respite is planned it should be arranged taking into consideration the situation for the particular child. However, it should be recognised that foster carers also have the right to their 14 days break entitlement;

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5. Once the decision has been made the Social Worker should record this on the child's file and the Supervising Social Worker should record it on the foster carer file and update the respite tracking spreadsheet;
6. If the respite is planned a Placement Planning meeting should be arranged. If a child or young person is having regular respite with the same carer a Placement Planning Meeting can include a series of respites and any updates can be passed on at the time of placement;
7. In an emergency this should take place as soon as possible after the child has moved but within 5 working days. However, as much basic information must be passed onto the respite foster carer at the point of placement, e.g. family time arrangements, medical information and routines for the child or young person, ideally the Placement Information Sheet (Appendix 2), should be completed and given to the respite/back up carer;
8. In both planned and emergency placements, Delegated Authority should be agreed. This may be agreed when the child or young person is first placed with the main carer, and the parent agrees the same delegated authority is given to a respite/back up carer. If this has not been agreed previously a new agreement must be set up so the respite carer knows what authority they have to make any decisions that are required;
9. If a placement is made in an emergency by the Emergency Duty Service, attempts should be made to place the child with someone that the child or young person already knows. It is therefore important to be clear on the file if a child has stayed with other carers and how the arrangement worked for the child. This information should be included in the case summary of the child's file. This information can then be used by EDS when considering alternative placements;
10. If a placement is made in an emergency, the child or young person should, as a minimum, be shown a copy of the carers profile which provides some photos and information about where they are being moved to;
11. If the placement is planned, arrangements should be made for the child/young person to visit the respite carer's home and be able to meet them and see the bedroom they will be using;
12. The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that the Placement Information Sheet (Appendix 2) has been completed by carers and given to the respite carer;
13. If the child has any specialist health care needs the carers should be trained and signed off on this before the respite takes place. In an emergency, the Social Worker/Supervising Social Worker must refer carers for emergency

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specialist health care training from the relevant Specialist Health Care team as a matter of urgency so that they can arrange to visit the carer and give them the training/instruction that they need.

**Post Placement**

When the placement has ended and the child/young person has returned to their main foster carer it is important that information is recorded about how the respite stay went from all perspectives. It is recognised that this information is likely to be in different places e.g. child's file, main foster carers file and on the respite foster carers file and several people are likely to have contributed to the overall picture.

The fostering team should also send out an end of placement form to the Social Worker and the respite carer to request feedback. This information will also be included in the foster carer's annual household review.

Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker should discuss respite arrangements with child and carers respectively (See Record Keeping below).

If any particular issues come up from discussions with either the main foster carer, the respite foster carer or the child or young person, then the relevant Supervising Social Worker and Social Worker should discuss as soon as it is known so any follow up can be completed in a timely way.

The IRO should discuss any respite arrangements in the next review and when they next see the child or young person on their own.

**Record Keeping**

The Supervising Social Worker of both the main foster carer and the respite carer should discuss the respite arrangement in the next supervision session. It is suggested that as well as recording it in the supervision discussion it is also recorded as a 'case note' so it can be highlighted easily if the information was required.

The Social Worker of the child or young person should talk to them about how the respite went and record this on Care Director. They should also complete the End of Placement form to provide feedback on the respite carer.

The respite foster carer should also complete foster carers diary sheet for the duration of the child's stay with them. The main foster carer should also record in their logs if the child or young person has given any feedback regarding the respite placement.



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**Appendix 1: Respite Information Checklist**

<b>Name of child</b>	
<b>Date of birth</b>	
<b>Social Worker</b>	
<b>Independent Reviewing Officer</b>	
<b>Name of Foster Carer/s</b>	
<b>Foster Carer/s Address, number and email address</b>	
<b>Dates respite required to and from</b>	
<b>Reason respite is requested</b>	
<b>Is the respite part of the foster carer/s 14 days break entitlement?</b>	
<b>Was respite discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting and Delegated Authority granted?</b>	
<b>Section of Children Act 1989 the child/young person is placed under?</b>	
<b>Date respite request received</b>	
<b>Date respite request agreed by child's Social Worker</b>	
<b>Date respite request informed to IRO</b>	
<b>Date respite request agreed by IRO</b>	
<b>Name of respite Foster Carer/s</b>	
<b>Respite Foster Carer/s Address, number and email address</b>	
<b>Respite Foster Carer/s Supervising Social Worker</b>	
<b>Are there any children sharing a bedroom which has not already been risk assessed?</b>	

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**Appendix 2: Respite/Back-up Carer to Carer Information Sheet**

<b>Name of child</b>	
<b>Known by any other name</b>	
<b>Date of birth</b>	
<b>Brief physical description</b>	
<b>Dates of respite</b>	
<b>Reason for respite</b>	
<b>Parents details</b>	
<b>Child's Social Worker name, number and email address</b>	
<b>Child's IRO name, number and email address</b>	
<b>Has carer to carer respite been agreed by child's Social Worker and IRO</b>	
<b>Legal Status of the child</b>	
<b>Are there any specific requirements relating to religion, culture or diet?</b>	
<b>Any matching considerations or implications?</b>	
<b>Has delegated authority form been agreed for the respite carer?</b>	

**Health**

<b>GP's/Consultant's and Surgery's contact information</b>	
<b>Dentist's contact information</b>	
<b>Are there any regular medications to be taken?</b>	
<b>Does the child have any special needs i.e. educational, learning, physical, health, allergies, methods of communication?</b>	
<b>Are there any specialist health tasks/needs? If so have these been</b>	



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<b>discussed and any training needs accessed</b>	
<b>Copy of signed medical consent received</b>	

**School**

<b>School address and contact information Year and class group Named tutor</b>	
<b>How does the child travel to and from school? How will they travel to and from school whilst on respite?</b>	
<b>Does the child attend after school club or extracurricular activities? Will these continue whilst on respite?</b>	
<b>School dinner arrangements</b>	
<b>Is there a risk of truanting? If yes, what is the agreed procedure?</b>	

**Respite placement**

<b>Transport arrangement to and from the placement</b>	
<b>Will the child have their own bedroom? If not has a bedroom risk assessment been completed?</b>	
<b>Will child attend family time during respite? If yes, what are the arrangements?</b>	
<b>Are there any persons the child cannot see and for what reason?</b>	
<b>Are there any particular concerns or risks with this child?</b>	
<b>Is there risk of the child going missing? If so are there any key places the</b>	

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<b>child regularly runs to or any useful addresses or contact information</b>	
<b>Are there any friends the child can continue to contact whilst on respite?</b>	
<b>Food likes and dislikes</b>	
<b>Details of child's hobbies and clubs they attend.</b>	
<b>Does the child have a mobile phone? Are there any restrictions?</b>	
<b>How much pocket money will the child receive whilst on respite?</b>	
<b>Child's current routines, including self-care and hygiene, bedtimes, getting up times, meal times. Can these continue in the respite placement?</b>	
<b>Are there any appointments or meetings that are due whilst the child is on respite? Can the respite carer attend?</b>	

**Main Foster Carer/s**

<b>Name of Foster Carer/s</b>	
<b>Foster Carer/s Address, number and email address</b>	
<b>Supervising Social Worker</b>	

**Respite Carer/s**

<b>Name of Carer/s</b>	
<b>Carer/s Address, number and email address</b>	
<b>Supervising Social Worker</b>	
<b>Driver or non-driver</b>	
<b>Other children in the household and ages</b>	

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<b>Pets in the home</b>	
<b>Smoker or non-smoker</b>	
<b>Please add any other information you think might be useful to know</b>	