



Foster Carer's Handbook



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Foreword

Dear Foster Carer,

Thank you for being a foster carer for children in Somerset on behalf of Somerset County Council.

Your affection and skills help to transform children's lives.

Fostering gives you a broad range of experiences, challenges, and rewards with outstanding support from experienced fostering service staff.

There is no greater privilege than being able to play a caring and parenting role in the life of a child, investing your experience, skills, and love in providing a safe, stimulating home in which a child can grow and reach their potential.

You will be well supported on your fostering journey, by your own supervising social worker, who will guide you and be available to help you with any questions that you might have. You will have access to a range of high quality and regular training plus a network of support from experts and your peers, to help you provide the very best of care for Somerset's children.

This foster carer handbook has been designed to support you on your fostering journey. It is full of information, advice, and guidance that we hope you will find helpful. The handbook directs you to other resources within Somerset too as well as those available nationally.

As practice, legislation, policies, and procedures change the handbook will be regularly updated.

Please do let your supervising social worker know if you feel there are improvements or suggestions that might improve the handbook.

We wish you well in your fostering career and hope that you have many rewarding years of fostering with us.

Thank you for caring for our children.

Yours sincerely,



Julian Wooster,
Director of Childrens Services



Tessa Munt
Lead Member Children and Families

Somerset Fostering Service

In Somerset, we are committed to providing the best possible service to our children we look after, by supporting them to live in foster families. Our vision is for children to be safe, healthy, happy, and ambitious for their future and to develop skills for life. We want them to grow up in loving families and caring communities.

As a Local Authority we are responsible for ensuring that the children we look after are emotionally and physically well, have a safe and caring family and access to a good education. We believe that the care and support we provide to the children we look after, should enable them to have happy, healthy, and successful lives.

Somerset Fostering Vision

Providing Children with a Safe, Healthy and Happy Home



			
Strengthening families and building resilient communities	Families making the right choices to support happy healthy lifestyles	High aspirations, opportunities and achievement for all	Getting the most out of life through play, leisure, cultural and sporting opportunities
Providing you with a home that is connected to your family, networks and communities	Understanding your journey, supporting your needs, health and wellbeing in all aspects of your life	Providing you with positive learning opportunities which support your ambitions for the future and help you develop skills for life	Providing you with opportunities to develop your skills, support your aspirations and experience positive enriching activities at home, in school and in your community
Supporting your families and carers so that they understand your needs			
Seeking the best long term, sustainable home that best suits you			

Somerset's Children and Young Persons Plan

Our vision is that Somerset children and young people are safe, healthy, happy, are ambitious for their future and develop skills for life.

We want them to:

- be treated fairly and have a voice in what matters to them
- achieve economic independence and contribute to their community
- learn well and develop skills for life
- make healthy choices and develop resilience
- be confident, ambitious and achieve success

We set out in our Plan what we aim to do, how we aim to do it and how we will know whether or not we have succeeded.

[Children and Young People's Plan \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/children-and-young-people-plan)

A BIG welcome to the Somerset Fostering Service.

You might be taking your first step into fostering or have many years of experience, equally I would like to welcome you and thank you for joining our great service that puts children at the forefront of all what we do.

We are committed to providing the best possible experiences for the children and young people in our care. For those children and young people where fostering is the plan, we endeavour to provide safe, secure, supportive, loving, and stable foster families so that children and young people in our care can achieve the best possible outcomes, and live happy, healthy, and successful lives.

Thank you for being part of our fostering family, and we look forward to working with you to improve the lives of children and young people.

Matthew Randles

Strategic Operations Manager – Fostering



Foster Carer's Responsibilities

Somerset County Council has entered into a mutual agreement with our foster carers (The Foster Carer's Charter – see link below) which details what everyone agrees to do and provide to ensure that the children and families we work with receive the best possible service. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foster-carers-charter>

When you become a foster carer, you will be asked to sign a Foster Carer's Agreement which sets out general expectations and responsibilities. You are expected to care for a child as a member of your family and include them in all aspects of family life. This means including children in family holidays and activities and taking children to school, clubs and encouraging their friendships and family contacts.

<https://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/Foster-Care-Agreement-2019>

The Fostering Service is regulated by The Fostering Service Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011. The service, including foster carers, must comply with the National Minimum Standards. The values statement below explains the important principles which underpin the Fostering Standards.

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.

- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings, and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the National Minimum Standards (NMS) to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

Fostering services: national minimum standards - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



DBS

We require that all adults living in a fostering household have initial DBS checks as part of the assessment process. This will need to be repeated every 3 years to identify whether they have any offences which may pose a risk to children. Only specific offences will affect your ability to foster. If you have past offences, you will need to discuss these with your assessing social worker as part of your fostering assessment so that a manager can make a decision about how the offences may impact on fostering.

If you or a member of your household, whilst fostering, are arrested, charged, or convicted of an offence you must inform your supervising social worker so that a manager can make a decision about how the offences may relate to fostering.

Health and Safety

Each fostering household will have a Household Inspection (Health and Safety Assessment) as part of their initial approval, this will be updated every year and a full assessment will be undertaken every three years. Children you care for are initially unfamiliar with your home and may not be aware of potential hazards. All children should be made aware of the escape plan should there be an incident such as a fire in the home.

Medical Fitness

Each foster carer has a full medical as part of their assessment and then medical updates are requested from your GP every 3 years. If you develop any new condition or illness which your supervising social worker is not aware of, you must share this information with them immediately. We will then discuss with you what support you may need to enable you, where possible, to continue to foster.

The Fostering Task

One of the greatest responsibilities any person can take on is the care of someone else's child. As foster carers you are expected to provide a very high standard of care and understanding to every child who comes to live with you.



When you do it well and you see a child develop, you know it is because you have given them a secure and stable and happy home. You don't get it right everyday, but you provide that sense of stability and security that they have never had and that goes a very long way.



By providing a loving home and family environment, a foster carer can make a real difference and change the story of a vulnerable young person in care.

Many of the children who are placed with foster carers will have experienced serious difficulties in their lives. The task of caring for these children is undoubtedly a rewarding one, but it will also bring about some tough challenges.

Supporting these children and working with their families, Children's Social Care and other agencies involved with the child can be challenging and frustrating at times for carers. There may be decisions made about a child that you would not make yourself and we would encourage you to discuss this tension with your supervising social worker.

Your supervising social worker's role is to supervise the care you give, support you to manage any difficulty and develop as a carer. Others in your support network, such as family and friends will be important for you to talk to also, although in these relationships you will need to consider the confidentiality of the child you are looking after.

Children (particularly those who have had a disruptive and unhappy time) often find it hard to "fit in" with another family. Regardless of their home circumstances and experience, many of them would prefer to be living with their own families and at times will make this very clear in ways that can feel hurtful to you as a carer. As a carer you'll need to develop strategies for you and your family to manage what can sometimes feel like very rejecting behaviour. Children in our care have had a tough time and most often will feel loyal to their own family, and we should not expect children we look after to be "grateful" to be looked after by us.

Some young people and children have experienced repeated moves from home to home for a variety of reasons; these may have been both planned and unexpected moves. These moves can often be interpreted by the young person as rejection, resulting in them having very low self-esteem and little or no self-confidence. This can

make it difficult for them to accept care and support from you and the wider foster family. This may be challenging for yourself and others, but it is important to remember that it will take time for a child to feel comfortable, safe, and secure in a new environment.

A young person who has been neglected, hurt, or rejected may equally reject efforts to make good relationships, and it will often take time for trust to be built. In the meantime, there can sometimes seem to be an impenetrable barrier between carer and child or sometimes a child can need disproportionate amounts of your attention in order to feel safe. Patience can be stretched to the limit, but time, consistency and commitment often win through. You will be offered training and support about how to manage some of the attachment difficulties and behaviours children have.



Our life was all over the place, but our foster carers took us in and gave us love, care and support, which made us feel safe. We're now much more settled, life is good and we're looking forward to the future. We can't thank them enough.



Children will react in different ways when they first arrive in a foster home. A child may be quiet or subdued, rude, or aggressive. Some children may behave as though they have known you all their lives and be overly affectionate, compliant, and eager to please. Almost all children will, whatever their presentation, be anxious and scared. Children need a welcoming, warm environment and some knowledge of what happens in your household. You will be supported to create a Family Profile document, which includes information about your home and family, with pictures that can be shared with a child before they join your family.

Prior to a child joining your family, a planning meeting will be held, which will explore ways in which you will be expected to meet the needs of the child.

There will be times when fostering will be very challenging and if you feel overwhelmed and there is a need for support it is important to share this with your supervising social worker. Seeking support is not a sign of weakness but is a strength as it shows that you are aware of your potential limits. Support is available and should be used. Please see the section on support for more information on what is available.

Your Own Family and Friends

It is essential to have the support of your whole family and your friends caring for children and young people. This means ensuring that any of your own children (and family) know what to expect, what is likely to change in the pattern of family life and what issues might occur at home or when attending education provisions. Your own children need to be aware of what is expected of them in their relationship with a foster child. You will need to remain aware and alert to how your own children are feeling and ensure that they have space and time to talk with you honestly about any difficulties or resentments they may have.

Although many children find fostering rewarding, it can also be difficult for them and may make them feel different from their friends.

We have a support group (We Care 2) for the children of foster carers, where children who foster are encouraged through trips and activities to share their experiences and form friendships with other children who foster. Supervising social workers and senior social work assistants will be able to provide information on how to access this support.

You may have your own children who when they become an adult may be considered suitable to support you in your fostering task. This should be discussed with your supervising social worker.

The Fostering Allowance and Fees

Foster Carers receive a weekly allowance for each child they foster which covers the living costs of caring for a child, including the cost of food, additional utility costs, clothes, school uniform, school trips, leisure activities, family outings and holidays. For Christmas and in the week of a child's birthday an additional payment is made to enable carers to buy presents and organise parties etc. If there are additional items that are needed for a child, these must be agreed with the supervising social worker in advance.

An enhanced payment is paid over the summer holidays as recognition of additional costs of holidays and outings. The costs of transport for family events and trips are met through the allowance. Additional transport costs specific to the child such as driving a child to school, for family time or a medical appointment can be claimed by carers separately. Additional information can be provided by your supervising social worker.

Children's Social Care will consider the request to fund one school trip for children in long term care during a child's time in care. This would usually be as part of their secondary school career and will need the consent of the Operations Manager for the

child. If other school trips are requested carers will be assisted to apply to the STAR charity, or to explore other possible funding avenues. If the trip is a short field trip costing less than £50 this cost should be met from the weekly allowance which will be paid despite the child being absent from the placement.

Somerset foster carers are also paid a fee which is a payment to the carer. The level of the fee varies in relation to your experience, skills, training, additional tasks, and type of fostering that you do. Your supervising social worker will explain how you can progress if you wish through the fee structure.

For more information on Fees and Allowances, please visit:

[Fees & allowances explained \(fosteringinsomerset.org.uk\)](https://fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/fees-allowances-explained)

Clothing

Your Fostering Allowance payment covers the cost of clothing on an ongoing basis, including school uniform and school equipment. If a child arrives with you with very limited clothing you will need to discuss this with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker, where in exceptional circumstances an emergency payment may be made.

For more information, please visit:

[Fees & allowances explained \(fosteringinsomerset.org.uk\)](https://fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/fees-allowances-explained)

Children that are Looked After have told us that it's important to their sense of value to feel that they have similar trendy clothing to birth children and their peers. Carers need to be aware, especially with teenagers of the need to provide some more expensive and trendy items.

Equipment

The initial cost of equipment needed for fostering babies and young children such as a cot or a car seat will be covered by the Fostering Service. The cost of these items will need to be agreed prior to purchase. You will be expected to provide or purchase age-appropriate toys and activities for children in your care. Special toys and sometimes bedding should move with children and can help a positive transition to their new home.

Insurance

As a foster carer, you will personally need to make sure that your house, building and contents and your car insurance providers are aware that you foster, and discuss with them the type of fostering that you do, the number of children and age ranges that you expect to look after. They will be able to help you determine which changes of household circumstances you will need to continue to inform them about. Check with them what is covered in the policy in relation to your role as a foster carer.

(Note: Some insurance providers/policies do not provide cover for accidental/malicious damage or theft arising from one's own children - and therefore foster children - in the home.

*For further information and helpful advice on **insurance for foster carers**, what to be aware of and what to let your provider know, please see [The Fostering Network's Home insurance for foster carers | The Fostering Network](#))*

If your home, car, or contents are damaged through your role as a foster carer you will need to make a claim through your insurance company as you would for any other claim. You should let your supervising social worker and the child's social worker know what has happened, what damage has occurred and the progress of your claim. Some insurance policies incorporate an excess, whereby the householder/vehicle owner pays the first part of the claim. In this instance you ***may*** request assistance from the service in covering this cost. However, any decision to provide financial aid to cover insurance excess will be made on a case-by-case basis and is only likely to be agreed in individual cases of particular difficulty.

If your claim is not successful or you are unable to claim for the damage under your own insurance policy, you may request for assistance from the service to cover the costs of the damage. In this instance, your Supervising Social Worker, will complete a claim form which requests that the service helps towards the costs of replacement/repair, which will then be considered by the Strategic Operations Manager on a case-by-case-basis.

As a foster carer you are indemnified for up to £150,000 against legal expenses, if you are subject to a criminal prosecution, under your membership with FosterTalk.

Membership cover includes:

- £10,000 per person for interview under caution
- £25,000 for civil proceedings
- £5,000 to make representation against a barring recommendation

If you believe that the damage has occurred through the Council's negligence, then you are fully entitled to put a public liability claim in against the Council. The matter will be fully investigated and either liability will be accepted, and the claim will be paid, or liability will be denied and a detailed explanation will be supplied.

If you wish to put in a claim against the Council, please contact the insurance team on insurance@somerset.gov.uk with the details of the incident, incident date, location and why you believe that the Council are liable for the damage.

Your Support and Supervision

Supervision Visits

Your supervising social worker will usually visit you monthly to supervise and support you. The frequency of the visits will be discussed and agreed between yourself and your supervising social worker and can vary, as necessary. To maintain communication and support, it is likely that your Supervising Social Worker will also make telephone contact with you in between visits. Very occasionally a lesser frequency is agreed for permanent, settled children and young people. We wish to work with all carers that are approved, which includes any partners and other adults within the fostering home. However, we understand that at times the main carer will be the only carer available. It is an expectation as part of our family model of support that where a Foster Family has more than one approved carer in the household, the second carer will make themselves available to meet with the supervising social worker at least every 3 months. There will be discretion in respect of this expectation which will be overseen by fostering team managers.

Supervision visits are a two-way collaborative process. The purpose of them is for you to let your supervising social worker know how things are going, and how you and your family are. You will discuss the needs of the child placed, their wishes and feelings and any practicalities such as health and dental appointments, and whether you have all the equipment you need.

It is important you share any worries you have with your supervising social worker as soon as you start to have them so that any support, advice, guidance, or training that would help can be arranged.



The social work team have been excellent. Our Social Worker is there whenever we need her, she reassures us and tells us when we are doing a good job. She sees the changes and growths and helps us strive to be better. We value her honesty and feel she is on our side.



It is also a time to share any positive news, challenges, or queries that you may have. Your supervising social worker will provide you with support and feedback about the care you are providing and offer advice and guidance on how best to manage any challenging situations.

Your supervising social worker will discuss and recommend relevant training, development and learning opportunities available to ensure you are equipped to provide the best care for the young person who is living with you.

Your supervising social worker will record these supervisions and you will be given a copy.

Records about your role as foster carers are kept by Children's Social Care in an electronic file. You have a statutory right to look at the records held about you.

Unannounced Visits

Your supervising social worker, or a qualified social worker in the fostering service have a legal duty to visit you unannounced at least annually. These visits will be conducted between the hours of 8:30am and 6:00pm Monday to Friday. However, there will be discretion for these visits to take place outside these hours, for example when carers are unavailable or working during these times. Your supervising social worker will be able to discuss this with you.

The child or young person's social worker will also make regular visits to see children/young people in the home. At times, and on occasion these will be

unannounced visits. The child's/young person's social worker should explain the reasons for these visits, if, and when they are required.

Foster Carer Reviews and Foster Panel

A review must take place at least annually for all foster carers. Additional reviews will be held if you have had a change of circumstances, wish to change your range of approval or if there have been any significant concerns.

Reviews are an opportunity for sharing views about your experiences and the service you are both giving and receiving. Your views and your own children's opinions will also be sought and recorded for the review, along with the views of the child in placement, the child's social worker and parents. Any proposed changes to your approval details will be considered at this time.

Your supervising social worker will write a review report which they will share with you before the meeting. Your review discussion will then be chaired by an independent person.

The first review after approval is presented to the local Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews do not need to be presented to panel unless they are considering significant changes to your approval, there are significant concerns about your practice or following an investigation into an allegation. You are invited to attend any Panel meeting involving you.

Support Services

Somerset County Council recognises the need for all foster carers to receive ongoing support and training. Fostering is a demanding task and carers need continuing help to develop their skills. When new carers are initially assessed they have access to the Buddy System, whereby they are given contact details of existing experienced carers who are happy to be contacted for support and guidance. They will also be given details of foster care support groups; these groups provide opportunities to meet with other carers to share skills, experiences, and common problems. Foster carers get a great deal of support from each other through these formal and informal networks.

There are also various other avenues of support available to foster carers, and specialist groups that foster carers can attend. These include FAST (parent and child) groups;

Rest and reflect support groups for foster carers- facilitated by child psychologists; and support from our emotional health and wellbeing team.

Your supervising social worker and their team is your first point of contact in the service to discuss worries or difficulties you may have. Each Fostering Team has a duty system which means you can speak to a supervising social worker during office hours if your allocated social worker is unavailable.

Outside office hours we have a Fostering Support Telephone Duty System available until 11pm in the evenings and on Saturdays and Sundays, where you can seek advice from a fostering social worker.

The Emergency Duty Team is also available to foster carers outside office hours for emergency situations such as a missing child.

Further details of various support are in the following sections.

Please see the useful numbers section at the end of this booklet for contact details.

All foster carers can attend on-going training and social events, and we offer on call support - so you are never far from help and advice.

The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is a fostering charity, that provides information, guidance, and support to all involved in the lives of fostered children. Their website has an abundance of useful advice and information about the fostering task, resources, research updates and which carers can access and utilise for free. The website is accessible at <https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/>

The Fostering Network also provides a membership service, which includes access to legal advice, a confidential stress support service and general helpline. For more information on the membership benefits, visit:

<https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/get-involved/membership/foster-carer-membership>

FosterTalk

Somerset foster carers are automatically enrolled as members to FosterTalk, which is an independent non-profit organisation which provides carers with the following benefits:

- Legal expenses insurance
- 24-hour Legal Advice Helpline
- Arrest and interview assistance
- Fostering Advice Helpline
- Accountancy, Benefits, National Insurance and Tax advice
- 24-hour Counselling Helpline
- Independent Financial Advice Helpline
- Quarterly Magazine
- Max Card Discounts
- 24-hour Medical and First Aid Helpline
- Webinars

FosterTalk also offer a range of discounted products and services, details can be found on their website www.fostertalk.org. You will receive information about these services directly from Foster Talk. If you do not, please raise this with your supervising social worker.

FosterTalk is an independent service paid for by the fostering service, and we encourage all foster carers to discuss membership with supervising social workers should they have any questions.

Care First

As a Somerset Foster Carer you will also have access to Care First's 24-hour confidential advice and support helpline and Care First Lifestyle online resource. Care First can offer support and guidance around

Family and Personal – relationships, divorce, child support, community care, changing a name, domestic abuse, parenthood, your home, elderly relatives, childcare

Workplace – bullying & harassment, conflict, environment, changes at work, working effectively, critical incidents, return to work, fit note, maternity/paternity rights and pay,

sick pay and health & safety at work

Bereavement & Loss

Addiction

Health – mental health, illness at work, nutrition, diet, stress, work life balance, fitness, smoking & drinking

Finances and Budgeting – debt, credit, banks, loans, and consolidation

You will be given a Care first leaflet with details and access information by your supervising social worker. If you haven't received this information, please contact your supervising social worker.

Somerset's Foster Carer's Association (SFCA) - Run by Foster Carers for Foster Carers

The Somerset Foster Carer's Association was launched in September 2015 and has a committee group that will develop the association, plan events, and develop support services. The SFCA is independent of the fostering service, which is run and owned by foster carers.

The SFCA aims to bring foster carers in Somerset together, providing them with a stronger voice that could influence and develop support services in the county. Carers will benefit by having opportunities to come together, sharing ideas and social networking that will develop the service for them and children in their care. The aim is to enhance support and guidance offered to foster carers in Somerset by increasing mentoring or buddy schemes, social events and fun activities that will be supported by fundraising activities.

The SFCA is undergoing development and changes; further and up to date information regarding the group can be gained from your supervising social worker.

Consultative Group

Carers have a right to representation through the Foster Carer's Consultative Group, which regularly meets with senior managers from Children's Social Care.

Somerset's Foster Carers Consultative Group is a mechanism with the primary objective of providing an arena to consult and liaise with a representative group of Somerset foster carers on information and forthcoming changes/new initiatives relevant to the fostering service and therefore to foster carers.

The group also provides an opportunity for issues which have come to the attention of foster carers to be shared with the management representatives who sit on the group and addressed where possible, and to get feedback from Foster Carers about service provision.

The group aims to contribute to the achievement and maintenance of a good quality fostering service which offers placement stability and security for vulnerable children and young people and enables positive outcomes to be achieved.

Contact your supervising social worker for the name of your local representatives and let your supervising social worker know if you are interested in representing other carers on this body.

Support Groups

There are well established local support groups available to you. These will provide you with the opportunity to meet other foster carers and share experiences, ideas, and parenting techniques, or just have a chat with others who understand you best. They are a valued resource amongst the foster carer community, particularly for new carers. Support group information will be provided to you by your supervising social worker and details of the groups are also circulated regularly in the countywide newsletter.

The Mentor System

Somerset offers a "Mentor System" where foster carers can be put in touch with a more experienced foster carer for support or advice. This can be for a new foster carer or for a carer, for example who would like support in relation to a specific area of fostering or to manage a particular difficulty or gain advice and guidance.

If you would like to discuss the option of support from a mentor, please ask your supervising social worker for more information.

Support for Children and Young People

Somerset In Care Council (SiCC) and Somerset Leaving Care Council (SLCC)

SiCC and SLCC are groups of children and young people who are in care or have left

care. The groups meet regularly to improve practice and influence developments in children's services in Somerset.

Further information can be gained by accessing the following weblink:

[Somerset In Care and Leaving Care Councils – The website for the SiCC and SLCC care councils \(somersetincarecouncils.org.uk\)](http://somersetincarecouncils.org.uk)

Mind Of My Own

Mind Of My Own is a participation tool for young people who use health, care, and education services. Mind Of My Own enables young people to have their voices heard and to participate in the decisions about their life. By using the website or the apps children and young people can say what they want when they want. Mind of My Own is not just about communicating with a social worker, it is also a direct tool that a social worker may use with the child in their care, to find out more about them and it can be used to prepare for a meeting or to give feedback afterwards. Younger children will need to be supported to access Mind of My Own and you will need to support them with access to an email address.

Please see the Somerset in Care Council's page for more information on:

[Mind Of My Own – Somerset In Care and Leaving Care Councils \(somersetincarecouncils.org.uk\)](http://somersetincarecouncils.org.uk)

Somerset Big Tent

Somerset Big Tent provides a range of services including positive activities, therapeutic services, and specialist support to increase positive wellbeing and improve mental health within children and young people aged 5-25 in Somerset, as well as support for parents and guardians. Signposted Services include help with:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self-harm and suicidal thoughts
- Obsessions and Compulsions
- Body Image and Low Self-esteem
- Sexuality and Gender
- Family/Relationships Concerns & Bereavement
- Support for Survivors of Abuse

- Loneliness and Isolation
- Ethnicity and Cultural Identity
- Community Opportunities
- Service for Parents and Guardians

Further information can be gained via the weblink:

[Home - Somerset Big Tent](#)

Mind in Somerset

Mindline is a confidential listening service, which can provide a safe place for Young People and carers to talk in times of distress. They are also able to offer basic information on mental health issues and how to access help and support from local services.

More information can be found at [Home - Mind in Somerset](#).

For listening and support services call Mindline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on **01823 276892**.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service- CAMHS in Somerset

CAMHS in Somerset is made up of a variety of teams that offer services to young people aged 0-18 years old who are struggling with their mental health.

They have bases all over Somerset and offer support to young people in the community and in their homes. They also have select services that cover the whole of the South West, such as Forensic CAMHS and National Deaf CAMHS.

CAMHS service can support young people who are experiencing:

- Sadness, low mood, or depression
- Feelings of worry, stress, or anxiety
- Low self-esteem/confidence
- Diagnosed eating disorders or those who have problems eating
- Problems with sleeping
- Visionary/Auditory hallucinations
- Suicidal/ Self harm thoughts or tendencies

Some of the services that CAMHS can provide include:

- Assessment of ADHD for secondary school age children
- Talking Therapies (individual/group therapist led sessions) – to help and support young people to talk about their feelings, either alone or with their family
- Creative Therapies – helps to explore feelings using play or games
- Assessment/Prescription/Review of medication – to help young people cope with feelings or minimise/control symptoms
- Provide advice and support to other professionals or carers on the best way to support young people who are experiencing difficulties
- Help to recognise and support the best treatment plan for a person experiencing difficulties with their mental health, inc hospital stays

Children and young people who will benefit from the CAMHS service will usually be referred by a health professional, their school or social worker. However, CAMHS in Somerset do accept self-referrals to the service. Information and advice about the service and how to self-refer, can be found here: [Self referral - CAMHS - Somerset NHS Foundation Trust \(somersetft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/self-referral)

Please note that if you feel that a young person you are caring for is experiencing difficulties that would benefit from a referral to CAMHS, or in the event of a crisis or emergency regarding a child's mental health, you must discuss this with your supervising social worker and the young person's social worker.

Barnados

Barnados is a charity that provides support and protection for children and young people in care and beyond. The scale of support offered by Barnados is big and complex, but they aim to provide the best outcome for every child, no matter who they are or what they have been through. Just some of the support offered to includes, helping children and young people and families through:

sexual abuse and exploitation

domestic abuse

mental health and emotional wellbeing

young people with a parent serving a prison sentence

asylum seeking

being a young carer

[alcohol and substance misuse](#)

[young people leaving care](#)

[homelessness](#)

[employment, training, and skills](#)

[LGBTQ young people](#)

[local children centres](#)

[For more information, help and support on any of the above, please visit:](#)

[What we do | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

Route 1 Advocacy

Route 1 Advocacy provides a service to young people in the care of the local authority. They can allocate an Independent Visitor and or an Advocate, to provide the young person with an adult friend who will listen to and spend time with them. They can help the young person know their rights, assist them in meetings and take them out for activities. They will work alongside individual children to ensure their voices are heard and their wishes and feelings are considered and shared with other adults

All children over the age of 8 years will receive an in person visit from a Route 1 volunteer in the first three months they are looked after and they will explain more about advocacy, Independent Visitors and Mind of My Own.

More information can be found by following the following weblink:

[Route1 Advocacy \(somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

Somerset Fosterers Email Accounts

A single secure Somerset County Council email account will be granted to each Fostering household. The account credentials will be owned by one carer within the household and can be securely set up and accessed on multiple devices. Guidance and video instructions on how to set up the email account can be found here:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/instructions-for-setting-up-your-somerset-email-account/>

Learning and Development (Training)

When you first become a foster carer, you are required to complete the Department for Education (DfE) Fostering Induction Standards, commonly known as TSD: training support and development standards. These standards have been introduced as the minimum requirement that foster carers should have in order to care for a child or

young person who is looked after.

You must complete the standards within 12 months of being approved and you will be supported to do this by your supervising social worker, senior social worker assistant, or/and an experienced foster carer if you would like a mentor.

In line with the Fostering Minimum Standards, Foster Carers are required to undertake mandatory training during and after assessment. In Somerset, the Learning and development team, in consultation with foster carers representatives and the fostering management team agree each year's mandatory, developmental and refresher development and training requirement. Annual plans are released at the end March with the opportunities becoming available to book and to attend from April.

The Children & Families Learning & Development Team (CFLD) are responsible for implementing the agreed learning and development plans. Fostering has a designated Staff Development Officer, SDO, within that Team who is responsible for the learning and development of Foster Carers.

The Learning Centre (TLC)

The Learning Centre is Somerset County Council's 'Learning Management System'. Like many organisations the County Council has invested in an electronic solution to host the majority of its learning and development opportunities. The system is internet based, meaning it can be accessed from any device that has an internet connection. The system has more than 300 online learning modules. Training that is delivered face to face is also booked online, via the system.

Alongside staff, our extended workforce, such as Foster Carers, have access to the content The Learning Centre holds. You will be issued with log-in details to the system and have access to all the content, some of which you'll find particularly pertinent to you, which we'll encourage you to complete.

Please contact TLC if you have any issues with any of the content including any difficulties you may experience with any e-learning modules.

TLC system is managed in the HR & OD Team and can be contacted by e-mailing TLC@somerset.gov.uk



The important thing to know is that you don't know it all, even if you think you do - you don't. The training is really important because there is so much to learn and you keep learning all the time. Nothing is better than the experience though but the training is vitally important



Full details of Mandatory training can be found on our website, or you can request a copy from your supervising social worker:

[Policies & Documents \(fosteringinsomerset.org.uk\)](https://fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/Policies%20and%20Documents)

Mandatory E-learning

- Care Certificate – Equality & Diversity (refreshed every 3 years)
- Food Safety – Level 1 (refreshed every 3 years)
- GDPR – annual refresher
- FGM (refreshed every 2 years)
- Prevent (refreshed every 2 years)

Foster Carers are required to stay up to date with their mandatory training and should be aiming for additional learning and development on top of the mandatory requirements. Somerset recommends 6 additional learning and development opportunities per year for the main carer and 3 for the second carer. Learning and development does not have to be solely attending opportunities provided through the Service, it can be independent reading and research.

All learning and development undertaken should be discussed with your Supervising social worker during your supervision. A written reflective account of your learning and how it has and will continue to inform your practice will be produced, as well as up to date personal development plan. Learning logs can be downloaded from each course page on The Learning Centre (TLC) and used for independent learning and development as well.

All learning and development opportunities and plans available to Foster Carers can be accessed through the weblink here [Course: Foster Carers Development Plan \(learningpool.com\)](https://learningpool.com/Course/Foster-Carers-Development-Plan)

Payment for Attending/Completing Learning and Development

A small payment is made to you when you attend training to encourage continual professional development, as well as to say thank you for your commitment. Furthermore, travel claims can be made to attend training as well as consideration for the payment of childcare. We also offer a number of E-Learning opportunities so you can learn from home.

Please see table below for current monetary incentives:

Activity	Payment
Attendance at face-to-face courses in an external building to your home	£20 per Carer
Attendance at virtual courses – through Teams or other virtual platforms	£10 per Carer
Completion of workbooks	£15 per Carer
E-learning modules	No payment

Receiving Payment and Updating of Foster Carer Records

When you attend a learning and development course either, face-to-face, in an external building to your home. on a virtual course on Microsoft Teams or other virtual platforms; please ensure the trainer/facilitator records your attendance. Once the final session of that course has been completed, the Children and Families Development Team will update Foster Carer records showing completion of the course and this will trigger payment to be made. We ask Foster Carers to allow 28 days for records and payments to be processed as this allows for any delays with the returns of attendance lists.

E- learning records

TLC will automatically update when you complete an e-learning module, but in order for your Fostering LCS record to be up to date, please inform your Supervising Social Worker when you have completed an e-learning module and they will update this record.

Booking and Waiting Lists

Places on learning and development opportunities are booked through The Learning Centre TLC, (please see section below). All courses are closed to booking 2 weeks before the course start date, this is to allow the course administrator to process the bookings, liaise with the trainer/facilitator and ensure everything is in place for the actual session. However, if there are places on the courses, please contact the Children & Families Development Team CFLD directly and we will book you a place or place. You are also able to be placed on a waiting list, should there be any cancellations. If you are placed on a waiting list, you may be contacted at short notice if places become available.

Non-attendance and Late Cancellations

If you are unable to attend training, you are expected to cancel as soon as possible. All cancellation records are held by the Children & Families Development Team and reported to the Fostering Management Team regularly. Persistent late cancellation and non-attendance of training will be discussed with you during supervision.

Please note that low attendance of training session may result in the training being cancelled and the learning and development opportunity being lost.

To contact the Children & Families Development Team, please email on: CFLD@somerset.gov.uk

Fostering Plus

Fostering Plus is a progression Scheme for Foster Carers. The required training and development opportunities for Foster Plus carers is more comprehensive.

Eligibility criteria for Fostering Plus Carers is as follows.

- Been fostering for a minimum of a year with Somerset or another fostering agency or provider when transferring to foster for Somerset
- Have at least 1 positive annual review
- The agreement and support of your supervising social worker.

Following meeting the eligible criteria and discussion and agreement with your supervising social worker, you will be supported to complete a fostering plus portfolio which evidences your skills and ability to meet the requirements of the scheme.

To find out more about the Fostering Plus process and requirements please speak to your supervising social worker or go to the Foster Plus page on the Foster Carers page on The Learning Centre.

[Course: Fostering Plus \(learningpool.com\)](#)

Level 3 Diploma for the Children & Young Peoples Workforce

As a further developmental opportunity in May 2021, the Fostering Service began to offer Foster Carers who have reached the Fostering Plus level the opportunity to undertake a nationally recognised qualification.

For more information about this opportunity please go to the Level 3 Diploma for the Children & Young People's Workforce page in the Career progression for Foster Carers section on TLC; [Course: Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young Persons Workforce Information Page \(learningpool.com\)](#)

Looking After a Child

We want all fostering arrangements to be successful and meet the needs of the child. Therefore, it is very important to plan for the child coming into your care as carefully as possible and to ensure that you are aware of all that you need to know about them.

To prepare a child to come and live with you they need to know about you. We expect carers to provide a child-friendly profile to help the child begin to understand your family and this work should start as part of your fostering assessment. Your assessing social worker or/and supervising social worker will help you with this. Before your foster child comes to live with you, they should have an opportunity to meet you and visit your home when every possible. On some occasions this may not be possible due to it being an emergency, or where there are complex circumstances.

Whenever possible and safe we try to find homes for children that are geographically as close as possible to their family home and community. It is important in terms of stability, continuity, and to provide a good sense of identity for them to maintain contact with family, school, and friends.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to discuss any child protection or safeguarding issues with you. Your supervising social worker will also draw up and

update a safer care policy plan, to take into account any particular needs of a child. The safe care policy plan will help you to think about what parts of the family's behaviour or routines may not be appropriate or may present a risk to your foster child and it will; look at ways of reducing risks and forming new safer care practises.

When a child joins a foster family, the social worker should provide you with various documents and information regarding the child, examples of which are below:

- The child's Information Record which should provide you with all the essential information you need to care for the child.
- A copy of any Court Orders relevant to the child.
- Risk Assessment
- Care Plan
- Placement Agreement
- Copy of a recent Assessment which gives an understanding of the child's history and needs.
- A record of the Delegated Authority agreed with you and the birth parents so that you know what decisions you can make on your own for the child.

During the planning stage, you may wish to ask questions and gather more information about the child or young person to help form a picture of how they will fit into your family and enable to you make useful preparations for their arrival. Some things you may wish to discuss may include:

- The child's legal status
- The child's religion, ethnicity, sexuality and or pronouns
- Whether they identify as the gender they were born with
- Whether they have any cultural or linguistic needs and how these needs can be met to promote the child's identity
- The child's likes and dislikes
- Whether the child has special dietary needs
- Does the child have any communication or behavioural difficulties and how these can be managed and overcome?
- Are there any known risks that should be considered?
- The child's family situation and any arrangements to spend time with family or other significant people to the child
- Previously agreed expectations of behaviour, rules, or boundaries and how these might be continued or incorporated into your own household expectations
- Pre-existing health conditions, including any allergies or medication
- The child's education provision
- Any additional educational needs and how these should be accommodated
- What belongings will the child arrive with and what should the carer provide before the child arrives

If a foster child is away from the foster home for any planned breaks, it will be the responsibility of the main foster carer to pass on the relevant information to the alternative carer or provider, to ensure that they have enough information and contact details to be able to care for the child safely.

Planning Meeting

A Planning Meeting must take place prior to, or within the first 5 days of any child joining the foster home. This meeting is attended by you, your supervising social worker, the child's social worker and where appropriate and possible the child's parents, and the child or young person. This will usually take place within your home. This meeting should ensure how information is shared; agree how you are able to meet the child's needs; and what support and help you might need. Any additional support necessary because of particular challenges or needs, such as any alternative care; short break care arrangements; transport; and particular equipment should be discussed and agreed at this meeting. The meeting will focus on your foster child's needs and any additional support that might be needed to meet the child's or young person's needs.

Your supervising social worker will usually chair the Planning Meeting. They will check that all documentation is in place with the child's social worker and that it has been brought to the meeting. If there is any information outstanding, how and when this will be provided to you will be agreed.

You will be given a brief outline of your foster child's history, any information on previous fostering arrangements for the child, and information on anything that might help with their transition into the new foster family. You will also be advised of the aims and timescales of the foster arrangement.

There will be a specific discussion around arrangements for the child in your care, to spend time with family and friends, in particular frequency, transport, and supervision.

Finally, it is important to confirm:

- Arrangements for introductions.
- Tasks to be done and by whom.
- Timescales the tasks need to be completed by.
- Visiting frequency.
- Date of the Child Looked After Review.
- The names of the people who need to know about the Foster Care arrangement.

- Arrangements for education.
- Clarification of roles.
- Delegated Authority
- Family time arrangements between the child and other family members or other significant individuals.

Support Meetings

A support meeting can be held at any time and may be especially useful during a transition time, to plan the support that may be needed in the future.

Sometimes you, your family or the child in your care may be struggling with fostering/being fostered and you or the child may need some support. If you are feeling stressed or finding things difficult, raise this with your supervising social worker and they will organise a meeting with you and the child's social worker to discuss how we can support you, and make plans to assist in the care you are providing. It is important to recognise as early as possible potential difficulties, so a meeting can be convened, and actions put in place. At times, a foster carer may not see this themselves, and it is important that everyone recognises the need to explore observations and thoughts together holistically, and if a support meeting is appropriate.

A support meeting must be held if a carer wants to give notice that they wish to stop fostering a child in their care. The support meeting will aim to review the support offered to you and explore alternative support arrangements that can be put in place to enable the child to remain in the foster home, where possible. It is important to remember that consistent care and stability is extremely important to looked after children and will be prioritised, where this achievable.

Keeping Records

As the person most involved in your foster child's day-to-day life, your observations, and experiences of them are very important to inform the planning undertaken by other professionals involved and to form part of the child's life story, which they may want to revisit at a later date. Consequently, the keeping and sharing of records, and the completion of foster carers logs is very important. Discuss with your supervising social worker and your foster child's social worker how you plan to record and share information, and the expectation regarding foster carers logs.

In the event that a disclosure or allegation is made by the child in your care, foster carers logs can serve to assist and inform any further investigations by Children's Social

Care, Safeguarding and the police, that may become necessary. It should also be noted that these logs may be submitted as evidence into Court proceedings and therefore it is essential that you consider the confidentiality of others in the foster family, including other children that may be in your care and those in your support network. For support on how to do this, speak to your supervising social worker.

Carers are able to email records to the child's social worker and their supervising social worker through a secure email facility. Usually this is expected on a weekly basis and more frequently if you are a carer on a specialist scheme or for certain children. Remember to record triumphs and milestones as well as challenges, so that your recording reflects the child in an unbalanced way. This can help with recognising patterns, triggers and behaviours and informing decisions about your foster child's routine and how best to support them.

As information you give to Children's Social Care about a child or family is placed on the case file and is accessible to those it relates to, it is important for you to think about how you record information and how this may be received.

The Child's Meeting - Children Looked After (CLA) Reviews

Each child in our care has regular review of their Care Plan, known as a CLA Review. These are overseen by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The review looks at all aspects of the child's Care Plan and a meeting will be held beforehand to consult children about the arrangements for the meeting and actively encourage their participation as well as offering them support to raise their views, thoughts, and feelings.

The first meeting is held within 20 days of the start of your foster child coming to live with you, the second within 4 months of the start of the fostering arrangement and subsequent reviews are held at least 6 monthly. You will be involved in these meetings. These are usually held in your home. You will need to complete a 'Carer's report'. A link to the report will be sent to you with an invite confirming the arrangements for the review and is filled in electronically. Important people in the child's life who are not invited to attend the meeting will still be consulted for their views. These meetings should make sure that there is a Permanence Plan in place for the child, which details all the options being explored for the child's future.

These meetings can feel less formal than others. For all children who are old enough, the arrangements for the 'who, what and where' should be agreed with the young person before the meeting. Children now receive a letter from their IRO after their review meeting rather than a report. The review will agree any changes or updates that

need to be made to the young person's Care Plan and the social worker will let you have a copy of the updated Plan within ten days of the child's meeting.



Foster carers are key to ensuring a positive review meeting, they know so much about how the child is feeling and can do so much to help prepare children and support them afterwards.



Visit from childcare Social Workers

All Children Looked After should have an allocated social worker who is based at the office in the area where the child lived originally. Their job is to keep in touch with the child, their family and you and to make sure care plans and review decisions are carried out and ensure that appropriate permanent outcomes are achieved as quickly as possible for the child.

A child's social worker should regularly visit your home to see how the child in our care is getting on. They must visit within the first week of the placement, and then at regular intervals thereafter (at a minimum of every four weeks during the first year). If a social worker doesn't visit, then you should discuss this either with your supervising social worker, the child's social worker or their manager. The social worker will want to talk to your foster child on their own and will also need to see the child's bedroom from time to time.

Keeping in Touch & Family Time

Keeping in touch with parents, siblings, or/and relatives is important in order for a child to retain relationships and a sense of their roots and origins. Foster children often have a love for and loyalty to their parents, even if they never see them or have experienced trauma by their actions.

For the child, family time may help ease their sense of loss, maintain relationships with, and provide reassurance about the wellbeing of relatives and other people important to them. Family time may help provide an opportunity for the child in your care, to gain more knowledge and understanding about their personal and family history, to accept their past, make sense of relationships and maintain their identity.

For carers, family time may help you improve your understanding of your foster child's family and their experiences and support you to give the child positive emotional support and help them develop a positive sense of identity.

The benefits of family time are not always obvious, and the child's behaviour can sometimes change, or become more challenging leading up to, or after family time. They may need additional support from you to manage this.

Family time arrangements may need to change over time according to the needs of the child in your care and the circumstances of the birth relatives and this should be detailed in the Child's Plan.

Managing Family Time

The frequency, timing, and location of visits with relatives and or other important people in the child's life, should be discussed at planning meetings and agreed by everybody concerned. Whilst it is essential that you pro-actively encourage family time you need to make sure that any arrangements agreed are "doable" and sustainable. It helps if you can make good links with a child or young person's family. Children need to sense that you feel that their family and family time is a positive thing for them. Remember that in many cases children being looked after will eventually return to live with their family as older children or as adults.

You can help both the child and the parents by:

- Talking to the parents about the child, especially the good things that have happened.
- Being honest and straight forward.
- Not being judgemental - the facts about what has happened in the family can often be different from the way they at first appear.
- Helping the child maintain a positive but realistic view of their family.

There is often hurt and misunderstanding on both the parent's/families and child's side about what has happened in the past. There may also be guilt. The carer should recognise, however, that most children really do want to spend time with their siblings, parent or parents, and family members, even if they can't openly express it.

Parents can feel very strongly about certain issues. Sometimes they will criticise your approach, possibly as a way of compensating for a sense of guilt or a feeling of having failed or been unfairly treated. Common areas of conflict can include hairstyles, pocket money, clothes, and bedtimes. How to manage these matters should be discussed and agreed at the Planning Meeting and set out in the Delegated Authority Agreement. Parental involvement in delegating authority is often the best way to resolve

potential areas of conflict. Your supervising social worker and the child's social worker should support you in this.

There is also the potential for carers to be drawn into conflicts between parents, family members and the Local Authority. Foster carers need to be mindful of this and be careful to keep the relationship with the family friendly but professional. Non-connected carers should not include parents as friends on social media, as this would in most cases cross a boundary of professionalism. Carers should also refrain from sharing confidential information about themselves, their own family or other looked after children within the foster family. Again, the use of supervision will be helpful to you, to navigate and reflect on getting the balance right.

Education

We are committed to providing a programme of full-time education for all children who are looked after. The Virtual School, led by the Virtual Headteacher has a specific responsibility to ensure that the educational provision for children and young people in care is both adequate and meets statutory requirements. Please send requests for advice and enquiries to thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk

If the child you are caring for is out of school without permission, you should contact the child's social worker or your supervising social worker immediately.

Wherever possible foster children should continue at the same school they were previously attending. In most cases this is far less disruptive for them and will support them to achieve to their potential and provide some stability and maintain relationships that have already been formed. If there does have to be a change of school, there will need to be discussions between you, the social worker, the child, their parents, and the Virtual School before it can be agreed.

As foster children are effectively members of your family, responsibility for attendance, visits to the school, checking the child's progress and discussions with teachers are all likely to be undertaken by you, although it is likely that the parents will continue to have contact with school too. The social worker will also visit the school from time to time.

It is important to establish who is the person in the school who knows your foster child best. This can be more difficult in a large secondary school. Each school is required to identify an individual teacher who will have special responsibility for any pupil who is being looked after by the Local Authority. This Designated Teacher should be able to help if normal communication links prove problematic.

There is a statutory requirement that every child looked after has a current Personal Education Plan (PEP). This plan is reviewed every term as part of a formal meeting. As a foster carer, you should be invited to PEP meetings in order to contribute your views and agree what you are able to do to support your foster child's education. PEP's are the forum to discuss the education plan and any changes or additional support that is required. The child or young person should wherever possible and appropriate attend their PEP meeting, their views should always be gathered and shared at the meeting.

The PEP meeting is also where discussions around additional funding through Pupil Premium Plus should take place and be agreed. For up-to-date information on PEP's and Pupil Premium Funding, please go to the Virtual School Website <http://www.somersetvirtuelschool.co.uk/>

Many foster carers have found it useful for copies of communication from the school about the child to be sent to both them and the parents. This would include formal things like school reports as well as invitations to events and meetings. You should talk to your supervising social worker about how best to arrange this.

Money for school meals, trips and equipment is taken into account in the Fostering Allowance payment.

Homework

Foster children are likely to have had a disrupted education for one reason or another. This may make it more difficult for them to concentrate on their studies. Foster carers should find them a quiet place to do their homework and actively encourage and assist them where necessary. Show an interest in what they are studying and how they are progressing. Be proud of their achievements, however small, and let them know about it.

Parent's Evenings

Children whose parents or carers show an interest in their education, growth and learning achieve best in the educational system. Therefore, it is important that foster carers attend Parent's Evenings and any other parents' meetings at the child's school. Where possible this should be agreed with the child's parents. Some parents lack confidence in these matters and are often grateful if you can go together, support them, and possibly ask questions on their behalf. If you are unable to attend Parent's Evenings, it is expected that you will make an appointment to discuss your foster child's progress at an alternative time with their teachers. If you are unsure about the best way to deal with the situation, talk to your supervising social worker.

Children with Special Educational Needs

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), which include physical, emotional, or cognitive difficulties, can affect a child or young person's ability to learn.

Some children may require an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan which identifies their educational, health and social needs and sets out the additional support required to meet those needs.

Some children with disabilities are entitled to receive Disability Living Allowance. Please see the Resources tab on our Fostering in Somerset page for the Disability and Living Allowance policy which explains what this is for and expectations of you as a carer as to how it should be used. [Policies & Documents \(fosteringinsomerset.org.uk\)](https://fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/policies-and-documents)

Health

All Children in Care must be permanently registered with GPs. If they are only temporarily registered the practice will not have their full notes, their immunisation reminders will go to the wrong address and any health issues that may arise while temporarily registered may never join up with their main records.

Foster carers should also ensure that children receive their full programme of immunisation against serious illnesses, although consent from the birth parents will probably be needed for this.

As a foster carer you are expected to organise and facilitate regular dental and optical check-ups and treatment and record these appointments.

It is important that parents are involved at all stages in their child's health care, as they usually know most about what has happened in the past. Whether or not you involve parents in taking a child for non-urgent treatment should be covered in the placement agreement. Please check this with the child's social worker. Each Child in Care will have a Health Plan which is regularly reviewed.

As a responsible parent you are expected to promote a healthy active lifestyle and healthy food within your home.

If you are caring for an older child, it is important that you discuss an approach to sexual health and sexual health education with the child's social worker so that you feel comfortable in your approach to the child and can keep them safe from harm.

Health Assessments

All looked after children should have an initial health assessment within 20 working days of being placed into Local Authority care. This is organised by the child's social worker. All initial health assessments are carried out by a doctor, usually a paediatrician, and in most cases at one of the main hospitals. Sometimes an assessment will have been carried out recently enough for a new one not to be necessary. There are two nurses specifically for children looked after who have responsibility for co-ordinating health assessments and promoting the health of children looked after.

It is important to encourage children to take advantage of the health assessments and reassure them that this is not an intrusive process. Many children can miss out on routine medical, dental or optician check-ups as they move around, with the potential for serious problems to get overlooked. Health promotion is also important as many lifestyle choices, and parental and carer choices for children and young people can influence health at a very early age.

Coronavirus (Covid 19)

We recognise that coronavirus had a significant impact on everyone, and especially those with caring responsibilities. As the Government guidelines and regulations continue to change, we recommend that carers access and follow the most recent Public Health advice on infection prevention and control.

The information and guidance for foster carers on how best to protect yourself, family and the children that you are caring for, from coronavirus can be found at [COVID-19: guidance for children's social care services - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services)

Everyone in the foster household should continue to practise good personal hygiene to minimise the risk of infection. When coughing or sneezing, use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose and dispose of it carefully after use, and wash your hands. Washing hands more regularly and for at least 20 seconds can prevent the spread of infection.

Children within the foster household should be supported and encouraged to follow preventative measures to reduce the risk of infection. Additional, information and

resources about ways to help children understand the need for preventative measures can be found at [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) - support for foster carers | The Fostering Network](#).

If the child you are caring for, yourself or someone else in the foster household contracts coronavirus, you should inform your supervising social worker and the child's social worker, so that they can make a plan about how best to support the child and foster family through the period of infection, in accordance with Government guidance.

If you have concerns or queries about coronavirus and the effect on your ability to foster, please contact your supervising social worker who will make a decision based on the individual circumstances of your family's situation. Every effort will be made to maintain a child's current fostering arrangement to promote stability, consistency of care and familiarity, which will help to ease any COVID related anxiety that the child may have.

Every effort will be made to continue face to face support services and visits where this is permitted and in line with Government guidance. Staff will exercise precaution and make any necessary risk assessments to ensure that face to face services are as safe as possible.

Medical Consents

Medical consent for treatment will be agreed in the Fostering Planning Agreement (Placement Agreement) form and normally will rest with the Local Authority or parent.

However, if emergency treatment is needed, your responsibility is to ensure treatment is provided. You should inform the child's social worker, your supervising social worker and the parents as soon as possible (or Emergency Duty Team if out of office hours).

Personal Health Records

Every child under five should have a Personal Health Record. Known as the "Red Book", this should go with them wherever they move. If you do not have a Red Book for your child, you should consult your supervising social worker. Each looked after child in Somerset is also provided with a version of this book called a "Blue Book" or "Health Passport".

It is useful for you to know what illnesses the child has had, which injections have been given, any allergies or special dietary needs, and any illnesses or health problems which may run in the family.

Even though a health visitor or local doctor will probably do it, it's a good idea for a carer to measure a child's height and weight occasionally. You should also keep your own record of their health, including illnesses, visits to the doctor and accidents. This information should be recorded in the Foster Carer Logs.

Guidance and Boundaries

In any home there needs to be basic rules and boundaries. A foster home is no exception. A basic level of structure and routine must be maintained, although this should be kept under review to accommodate the changing needs of the child, you and your family.

When the child is given responsibility, you must ensure that the goal set is achievable for them. Try to ask children to do what you want them to do clearly rather than tell them "Don't do...". Foster children frequently carry with them a sense of failure, often blaming themselves for whatever may have happened to them and/or their family. Whatever the result the child should be praised, and all positive outcomes supported and encouraged. Small achievable steps which can be positively re-enforced and built upon need to be identified.

Building Relationships and Stability

Each foster family is different, but the essence of a successful fostering experience is that the child or young person should, as soon as possible, feel both comfortable and accepted in the household.

Good relationships are founded on understanding and respect for another person's point of view, even if you don't agree with it. You therefore need to appreciate that your way of seeing and doing things may be very different from that of the child or young person you are caring for. You should recognise their needs, what the aims of the fostering arrangement are and the part you are expected to play. Hence the importance of clear Care Plans.

Relationships also take time to build. They depend on patience, perseverance, and the ability to understand inappropriate behaviour. Positive ways to establish a closer bond with a child who may have experienced destructive and abusive behaviour from the

adults in his or her life should be discussed and explored.

The behaviour of a child with this type of background can often be accompanied by physical or verbal aggression. This can evoke all kinds of feelings and reactions in carers, from dislike, to fear, to anger. A fuller understanding of the child's behaviour, emotional level and attachment difficulties will help you to respond appropriately. Your supervising social worker and the child's social worker can help to provide support around managing this.

A carer must understand that it is impossible to change the past. Initially it is therefore important to concentrate on the present circumstances and relationships, and to build on these and future aspirations.

Promoting Identity

Every child needs to establish an identity for themselves, a clear idea of who they are and where they have come from. For looked after children, this is particularly important, as they are likely to have had experiences that would have had a negative impact on their own sense of identity and understanding of where they belong.

A person's identity includes their name, history, heritage, language, culture, talents, religion, ethnic background, sex, identified gender and dis/ability. As a foster carer you will be expected to promote a positive identity for the child, by recognising and celebrating their history, individuality, and potential.

A child may develop a negative sense of identity or have their sense of identity weakened when they are no longer able to live within their own family. It is therefore important that carers support children to promote and develop a positive identity.

As a foster carer, you will need to ensure that the care you provide is personalised to the needs of the child and conducive to the positive development of your foster child's emotional resilience and self-esteem, promoting and encouraging their identity needs in a holistic and culturally competent manner. You will want to consider and support aspects of the child's identity, particularly where these differ from your own, and others within the fostering household.

Where appropriate and safe to do so, children and young people should be given the independence to make their own choices about the foods that they eat and clothes that they wear.

You will be expected to explore with the child their understanding of family and the roles within it. This can vary from family to family and culture to culture. Whether the child has ideas about or come from a culture that promotes expectations of specific gender role obligations or hierarchical status within the family setting. Whether there are particular subjects which are taboo for them and do these differ from any that your own family may have. You will need to consider these aspects of the child's culture and history, which can sometimes be difficult to navigate particularly when the child's expectations are so far from your own. Where appropriate and safe to do so, these expectations should be recognised and respected as a valid but alternative way of family life, and you will need to sensitively accept aspects of them whilst supporting the young person to explore and understand the varied expectations and ideas of your own family. It is likely that you may have to adopt a multi-cultural approach to caring for your young person, by accepting and adopting aspects of their culture whilst, sharing and supporting them to understand and accept aspects of your own. Whilst you may not feel comfortable adopting all aspects of other cultures that differ from your own, it is extremely important that you acknowledge and respect them, discussing them regularly in an age-appropriate manner, to review the child's understanding and reinforce and maintain this aspect of their identity.

Information about your foster child's background and individual needs will be shared with you during the planning meeting. Using this information, your supervising social worker will advise and support you to identify ways in which your foster child's identity needs can be met.

It may also be useful (where possible) to discuss your foster child's cultural and heritage needs with the birth family. For example, the child's religious beliefs, family traditions and celebrations, cultural dress, and things that they may like to eat or items that they may like to have with them in the home. It may also be useful to have an insight into local facilities, events, festivals, or celebrations that uphold the child or young person's ethnic, religious, or cultural needs. This will enable you to support and encourage the young person in your care to maintain these cultural links.

Having a good understanding of the child in your care's history and identity needs is particularly important for children who do not share the same background or culture as your own family. This can help to foresee, prepare for, and minimise any difficulties that may arise as a result of the child's own experiences being very different to those of their foster family.

Having a better understanding of a child's culture and background can help you to celebrate and explore it within the foster household. For instance, allowing your foster child to introduce the foster family to a new dish or tradition from their own culture, will help them feel accepted and will broaden the experiences of the rest of the family. Birthdays and cultural holidays and festivals should be celebrated in line with the child's own traditions and wishes and feelings where possible, which will enable the child to preserve their cultural heritage.

Language is an integral part of a child's identity and culture. If you care for a child whose first language is not English, it is extremely important that they are encouraged to maintain their linguistic and communication skills. Your supervising social worker can offer support and advice on ways in which this can be achieved.

Somerset does use regulated services for translation and interpretation facilities and your supervising social worker can assist you with accessing these, if this is needed.

It is important to identify positive role models from the child's own culture and maintain and encourage this connection where possible. Children and young people should also have access to toys, dolls, books, and DVDs that reflect their own ethnicity.

If the child practises a religion that is different to your own, careful consideration and effort should be given to arrangements for the child to continue practising their faith and attend religious ceremonies. Where possible this should be achieved within the religious community that they are accustomed, to maintain familiarity and cultural links.

Careful consideration of your foster child's individual hair or skincare needs should be explored and maintained where possible, which can help them to develop and maintain positive cultural aspects of their identity. For example, identify local

resources, hair care techniques or products that specialise in African Caribbean Hair or acknowledge cultural expectations for children of certain religions around covering, or not cutting hair.

For children with a recognised physical or learning disability, it is important that they can develop a positive disability identity. The young person should be supported and encouraged to feel pride and value in their disability, as opposed to viewing their disability as a flaw or weakness. Introducing your young person to positive examples of disability, such as sports, activities or disability advocates or groups. Researching celebrities, Paralympians, intellectuals, academics, and leaders who have a disability is a wonderful way to encourage children to view their disability as a “superpower” rather than an imperfection.

Acceptance of a young person’s sexuality and gender identity is integral to promoting a positive identity. Throughout childhood and adolescence, a young person is developing, understanding, and realising aspects of the gender identity and sexuality which may be new to them, or difficult to make sense of. Children and young people must be supported and nurtured to become who they are and feel safe and protected in doing so. As a carer you will be expected to confidently explore discussions around sex, relationships, gender equality and consent with your young person in an age-appropriate manner. Identifying appropriate support, information, and resources to promote a healthy and positive sexual and gender identity.

For more information and support around gender identity and sexuality, please visit:

It’s ok 2BU - LGBTQ+ - organisation that provides support, advice and guidance to young people living in Somerset who are finding it difficult being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender and or are questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

<https://www.2bu-somerset.co.uk/>

Life Story Work

Children who have experienced a change in their primary care giver, or multiple changes, can have feelings of abandonment, loss and anger and they can find it

difficult to piece together a chronology of their life events and the reason for these. This can result in gaps in the story of their life and be damaging to their sense of identity.

All children who are placed in the care of Somerset County Council are entitled to life story work and a life story book which will provide the child with a realistic and honest account of their circumstances, their family history, identity, and an age-appropriate understanding of the reasons why they are in care.

Life story documentation will follow the child and be continually updated and added to throughout the time the child is looked after. Along with a life story book and other documentation such as an annotated memory box and photograph albums will be collated.

Whilst the child is living with you, you will be expected to keep and add to the annotated memory box, by taking photos and keeping records and mementos of important events, including family visits and special days out. Foster carer logs can be a great source of input for the life story work and therefore it is important to write down the fun and positive information, and not just the days which are difficult. This information, in addition to the photos and mementos, will help inform the social worker's Life Story Work for the child, and will be important to the child potentially into adulthood, for example when they have their own children.

The Life Story Work (and later life letter if the plan is adoption, and when a child moves) are very sensitive pieces of work and are generally completed by the social worker who knows the child, their family and all the relevant background information to ensure all the facts are correct. As a foster carer you play a very important part in this, and life story work is not a one-off event or piece of work and should be explored with and by foster carers in a sensitive way and throughout a child or young person's journey. The child's social worker and your supervising social worker will be able to discuss and explain the expectations of this work and agree a plan if required.

Your relationship with the child in your care might be such that you are asked to play a more active role in this piece of work if you feel comfortable to do so. The plan on how this work will be done should be based on what suits each individual child's needs best.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

It can be particularly challenging for children and young people who come into care if they speak a different language or have a different culture, race, or religion from those they are living with, and those in the community, and they may be at greater risk of discrimination. It is essential that as a carer you actively promote and encourage a child's heritage, as it contributes powerfully to their sense of identity. Heritage includes the child's unique sense of family identity, values, traditions, culture, and possessions handed down by previous generations.

Somerset County Council are committed to improving the experiences and opportunities of every looked after child. We believe that "a child's life is like a piece of paper, on which every person leaves a mark" and we want to work hard to ensure that the behaviour, language, and actions of those involved in caring for our children, leave a positive mark, that will promote, support, and encourage happy and healthy lives and brighter futures for all our children and young people. As such, we are dedicated to an approach which celebrates diversity, respect and dignity and promotes desistance of racism, discrimination, and inequality.

However, despite our best intentions, sadly, we recognise that racism and discrimination exists and its impact on those who are subject [to it](#), can be extremely damaging and debilitating. It can affect a person's feelings of self-worth, can induce anxiety, depression, sadness, and anger. It can impact their emotional and physical health, education, learning, development and career opportunities, relationships, and experiences.

Racism and discrimination can be present in many forms. It is not always direct or obvious to recognise. Research has shown that often a person's life experiences, or own beliefs and values will cause them to instinctively make an unconscious decision about a person or group of people, based on a particular characteristic. Such characteristics include age, weight, skin colour, gender, education level, disability, sexuality, accent or social status. This "stereotyping" can result in unreasonable preferential or detrimental treatment of the person the decision, judgement or assumption is made about. It is likely that many of us have been "unconsciously bias"

in making a decision or assumption about a person or situation at some point, and even more likely that we do this on a regular basis. These decisions are made because of our subconscious thought processes, to enable more of our mental resource capacity to focus on other tasks. However, these subconscious assumptions can result in racism, discrimination, and lack of inclusion and when not addressed, the harm that they cause can be just as damaging as direct or intentional discrimination. As these assumptions or judgements are made unconsciously and are therefore not deliberate, it is not as easy to refrain from making them. The most effective way to "retrain your brain" from making them is to accept that we do and to have a better understanding of those that our assumptions are negatively affecting. The better educated we are about a person's culture, heritage, background, talents and how they feel when an inaccurate assumption or discriminatory judgement is made about them, the less likely we will be to make them.

Anti- Racist Statement

The disintegration of humanity because of racism has been and continues to be a destructive reality within society. It is important to accept that although, through the generations, there has been some progress in attitudes towards racism, modern racism still exists. It exists within our social structures, racial bias, systemic racism and perpetual racial and ethnic inequities.

The plight against racism, is not the concern of black and ethnic minorities alone. It must be the responsibility of everyone. As an organisation, who's central focus is the wellbeing of the children we care for, we are committed to tackling racism head on to improve the lives of children, and all of those who support them.

Anti-racism is an attitude. It is an ongoing process of recognising, challenging, and advocating change to attitudes, beliefs, and processes. It cannot be achieved through a single action but must be promoted and encouraged in everything we do. The change in attitude must be a holistic one, and it is the responsibility of the entire team supporting the child to act as role models for equality and inclusivity. This includes carers, professionals and organisations that are involved with caring for or supporting the child.

Somerset County Council commits to a zero-tolerance approach to racism and discrimination of any form; and any such incidents that we are alerted to, will be dealt with at the earliest opportunity and through the appropriate channels.

Any individual may raise a complaint of racism or discrimination, which will be thoroughly investigated, and no child, carer or employee will be penalised for doing so unless it is without foundation and not made in good faith.

Somerset County Council make a firm commitment to developing and supporting our employees and carers, so that we have an appropriately skilled team around the child to tackle issues of racism and discrimination. Staff and carers will be expected to undertake diversity and inclusion training upon approval or induction, and as identified as a training need during supervision or other route. The Equalities and Discrimination e-learning module is a mandatory module for all carers and further optional Culture and Identity Competence training is also available.

As a Foster carer, you will be expected to identify racism and discrimination experienced by the child or young person and will often have to act as an advocate for those in your care. You will also be expected to encourage and support them to understand their own rights and appropriate ways to speak up and challenge when they are oppressed. If the child or young person feels empowered to acknowledge and celebrate diversity at home, they are more likely to feel confident in challenging discrimination independently.

We also understand that as a foster carer looking after children and young people with complex needs, that you may witness the young person that you are caring for displaying behaviours that are considered discriminatory and or racist or may even be subject to this behaviour. It is important that the young person understands that such behaviour is illegal and extremely harmful, and therefore you should offer information and support around racism and discrimination and the consequences of such behaviour, using age-appropriate language.

For more advice on explaining racism and its effect to children, please visit:

[Talking to children about racism | NSPCC](#)

Please see the following links for more information on racism:

The RAISE Project at Young Somerset

Young Somerset provide support to minoritised children, young people and their families around incidents of racial discrimination, harassment, exclusion and social isolation.

They work with schools, colleges, youth clubs and other agencies to promote cultural awareness, understanding and inclusion.

<https://www.youngsomerset.org.uk/>

SARI

Sari is a charity that offers support to those effected by hate crime (equalities and identity based/aggravated crimes and incidents)

Support service for all hate crime/incidents, including incidents people do not wish to report to the police.

<https://saricharity.org.uk/>

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)

We are a team of specialist teachers and EAL support advisors who work closely with schools, children and young people, to promote inclusive approaches to learning with the aim of raising aspirations and attainment for these minority groups

<https://www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/Services/3250>

Understanding and Responding to Behaviour



When you do it well and you see a child develop, you know it is because you have given them a secure and stable and happy home. You don't get it right everyday, but you provide that sense of stability and security that they have never had and that goes a very long way.



Children and young people who have experienced trauma and ruptures in their family relationships, can struggle to make sense of and find words for what they are feeling. Instead, feelings, worries and muddles are often expressed through their behaviour. As with pre-verbal infants and toddlers, it is the adult's job to try to work out what might be needed. This process of understanding can helpfully come about through gently observing and allowing yourself to feel curious about your foster child, by noticing your own emotional responses to their behaviour, trying out different things that might help and noticing what the child in your care can and cannot manage.

Whereas a lot of this will happen naturally, this can feel harder with older children when their behaviour seems at odds with what they appear to be wanting or needing. For example, it can be hard to see how underneath a child's very controlling behaviour, they might be feeling frightened. Or how by hiding an important possession such as your car keys, they might be testing out that you are holding them in mind.

When feeling under fire as a parent or carer, it can be hard to think clearly about what a child might be communicating to you. Attachment research tells us that the process of trying to make sense of a child's behaviour and finding words for their worries has significant developmental and relationship benefits. In the heat of the moment, a few understanding words can help soothe your foster child's frightened or hyper-aroused state.

Even with more challenging behaviour, which can feel defiant or aggressive, your foster child is likely to be wanting you to understand something. Perhaps they are pushing your limits, to make sure you are safe and strong enough to manage them and keep them safe.

It is also important to recognise the times when you might need additional help and that you feel able to ask for this. This is likely to mean talking to your supervising social worker or your foster child's social worker and the other key people involved in supporting you, to support the child in your care.

Supporting your foster child to settle and feel safe and comfortable with you, needs to be the priority. This will be most effectively achieved through attending to your relationship with them. Through this they may begin to find words for their worries and distress rather than act on them and hopefully be able to share with you, their successes.

Here are some key principles and top tips to be mindful of:

- The best way to help a child feel safe is through your relationship with them.
- Try to think of behaviour as a communication (not just an action). What might they be needing you to understand?
- Noticing, being interested in and accepting feelings will help you build a strong relationship with your child.
- Feeling in control of your behaviour is more effective than trying to control their behaviour.
- Limit setting will be necessary at times but 'connecting before correcting' can make this more effective.
- When children first come into foster care, they can be on their 'best behaviour'. As they begin to relax more into your care of them, they might begin to test the relationship. This can be a crucial opportunity to deepen your relationship with them by acknowledging that perhaps a part of them is expecting you to dislike them or to stop caring for them. They might also have very confusing and conflicting feelings about allowing a relationship with you and feelings of loyalty towards their parents. It might be helpful to gently explore and name this.
- It is natural to enjoy and reward positive behaviour and sometimes consequences will feel necessary when behaviour becomes challenging. However, this can be of limited effectiveness as it only serves to reinforce how conditional relationships can feel. Sometimes the most powerful thing is to show understanding.
- Because of their experiences it is very likely that your child will hold some core beliefs about themselves, such as they are 'bad' or 'unlovable'. Helping them to accept all of their feelings will help them develop a healthier sense of themselves.

- Children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma (also referred to as early or relational trauma) often have much younger emotional needs. Responding to your child's needs for comfort at a younger age (think infant!) and accepting behaviour you might expect from a younger child can help establish a sense of emotional safety and provide the best opportunity for their emotional development.
- It can be very helpful to attend to and think about the feelings that arise in your relationship with your child. Some of these feelings might be yours and belong to your past, but they might also belong to the child and be a helpful way of understanding something that your child cannot easily express.
- When things go wrong in your relationship, taking time to repair can be very powerful for a child.
- A child/young person may not know why they did something. It may be hidden to them. They may need some time and help to explore and think about this, but we don't always need to look for answers and explanations.
- Look after yourself & try not to take things personally.
- Maintain a sense of fun.

Practical PACE Guide

The Practical Pace Guide aims to provide some practical tips for using and being 'PACE' as a parent or carer. A copy of the PACE Guide will be provided to you by your supervising social worker.

'An attitude or stance of [Playfulness](#), [Acceptance](#), [Curiosity](#) and [Empathy](#); qualities that are helpful when creating emotional safety and when trying to stay open and engaged with another person. This, in turn, helps the other person stay open and engaged with you. These traits are similar to the attitude that [parents](#) routinely show when communicating with infants.'

DDP Network

Somerset offers training to carers in relation to managing challenging behaviour and foster carers should be given a full copy of the policy by their supervising social worker.

A copy can also be accessed on the Fostering in Somerset website.

<https://www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk/resources/policies-and-documents.htm>

Online Safety

Today, almost everyone is online in some capacity, especially children and young people. Whether it be using social media, downloading apps or accessing websites, watching videos or sending pictures, gaming or research for homework. The advantages to education, communication and information are endless. However, it is vitally important that carers are aware of the potential dangers that young people and children are exposed to when using the internet and creating an online presence, such as cyberbullying, exploitation and even human trafficking.

Carers should discuss the potential dangers and ways in which children and young people can protect themselves from online risks in an age-appropriate way.

Some of the common safety risks include:

- Sharing of location and personal information, this can be particularly difficult for looked after children, who may not understand the risks of sharing such information to family and friends, whom they may perceive to be safe adults. Children should be reminded about the consequences of "checking in" on social media or posting pictures and updates about where they are going, or where they have been.
- Sharing/sending pictures of themselves – once a photo is shared online, it is almost impossible to remove it. Encourage young people to think about any pictures that they send, the content of that picture and whether they would be happy for that picture to be viewed by everyone!
- Expressing negative feelings/emotions towards themselves or others – traffickers and cyber bullies will seek children and young people who seem vulnerable and unhappy, attempting to befriend them and manipulate them to achieve a certain outcome.
- Talking to or becoming "friends" with strangers online – It is often difficult for children or young people to understand the danger posed by online strangers, as the threat may not seem as direct as speaking to a stranger in person. However, children should

be reminded that the internet is a perfect place for experienced criminals to gain information about them and therefore pose as someone entirely different, in order to befriend, manipulate and exploit them or others.

- Agreeing to meet someone, they haven't met before in person – If a child or young person has been speaking to, messaging or gaming with someone online, it is easy for them to believe that they know that person. Children should be reminded that "online strangers" are still strangers.
- Accessing violent, inappropriate or sexual games or content- Carers should ensure that parental control and age-appropriate restrictions are applied to all devices.
- Downloading email attachments from unfamiliar recipients or pop ups that may infect your device with malware

If possible, computers should be located in communal areas within the household, and carers should monitor their use. Children should be educated and guided by you on the safe use of social media and online safety and this aspect of care should be regularly discussed with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker. Somerset provides training to foster carers on online safety, the dangers and risks, warning signs and ways in which you can minimise risks and support children and young people to protect themselves.

Carers must be mindful that those children that they care for are treated the same as other children and young people in the household, and that dangers and risks are explored fully with the child's social worker and supervising social worker. If extra protective measures are needed for a child that is at risk, a way of managing this should be agreed with the child's social worker, which is also sensitive to all children and young people in the household. The balancing of risk, and the feeling of being different, or being treated different needs careful consideration.

Visit any of the following web sites for more information and advice on keeping children safe on the internet:

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.www.gov.uk)

[Childnet — Online safety for young people](#)

www.chatdanger.com www.fkbko.net www.iwf.org.uk

Bullying

Bullying involves an ongoing campaign of physical or psychological violence conducted by an individual or group against someone who is unable to defend him or herself in that situation. It doesn't have to involve actual physical assault, name calling (face-to-face or via the internet), extortion of food or money and exclusion from friendship can be just as wounding.

Some examples of bullying include:

- Physical – pushing, poking, kicking, hitting, biting, pinching or any use of violence etc.
- Verbal - name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, threats, teasing, belittling.
- Emotional – being unfriendly, excluding, ignoring, isolating others, tormenting, hiding books, threatening gestures, ridicule, humiliation, intimidating, excluding, manipulation and coercion.
- Racist – racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Discrimination – race, culture, disability, gender, sexuality, age and appearance
- Sexual – unwanted physical contact, inappropriate touching, abusive comments, homophobic abuse, exposure to inappropriate films etc.
- Online /cyber – posting on social media, misuse of associated technology, i.e. camera and video facilities, sharing photos or videos, sending nasty text messages, social exclusion
- Indirect - Can include the exploitation of individuals.
- Peer Pressure – gangs, drug use, smoking, alcohol, crime
-

(Source: Anti-bullying Alliance Organisation and Kidscape)

Studies show that over half of all young people say they have been bullied at some point in their lives. Children who are bullied tend to be those who are different in some way from others and therefore, children who are care experienced are among some of

the more vulnerable when it comes to bullying and the prevalence of bullying increases as the child gets older.

Children in care report:

- Twice the level of bullying than other children in primary years (see Safe To Play 2008) - 38% vs 19%
- Four times the level of bullying than other children in secondary years (see Safe To Play 2008) - 36% vs 9%

(Source: Anti-bullying Alliance Organisation)

It is common for children and young people to conceal the fact that they are being bullied. This may be due to fear of reprisal, embarrassment or not feeling like they would be believed. Carers should therefore be aware of some of the common signs that would indicate a child is being bullied and offer reassurance to the young person that they are always able to share their worries and concerns with you (or another identified, responsible adult) and that you/they can help and support them.

Some common signs of bullying are:

The child has injuries which they are unable to offer an explanation for or the explanation doesn't seem genuine/plausible

- The child seems to be "losing" or "accidentally" damaging items more frequently
- The child is fretful, tearful or more easily upset than they would normally be
- They argue more with siblings/other household members
- They no longer talk about school or friends
- They do not want to go to school
- They report minor illness/ailments more frequently resulting in school attendance decreasing
- They are not invited to parties or social gatherings
- The child becomes withdrawn

- The child's behaviour appears more challenging
- The child's academic performance is declining
- They lose focus/concentration easily

It is also important to recognise that those who bully sometimes do so because they have experienced some form of bullying, abuse or trauma themselves. Those who bully may feel insecure, lack confidence or are unable to control their own emotions and use bullying as a way to regain some control of themselves or their own situation.

If the child you care is responsible for bullying, it is important that you understand why they have behaved this way. The best approach will be to remain calm and gather as much information as possible

As a carer, if you become aware or suspect that the child you are caring for is being bullied or is bullying others, you must report it to your supervising social worker and the child's social worker as soon as possible. If the bullying is taking place at school, you should report it to the school and ensure that a plan to tackle the issue is agreed.

Kidscape have produced top tips guidance for children and carers which you can access here:

[Top tips for children FINAL \(kidscape.org.uk\)](https://www.kidscape.org.uk/top-tips-for-children-final)

[Top tips for parents & carers FINAL \(kidscape.org.uk\)](https://www.kidscape.org.uk/top-tips-for-parents-carers-final)

Drugs and Alcohol

Children and young people can experiment with drugs and alcohol. Sometimes this is just experimentation. However, children we look after are more likely to have experienced loss and trauma and therefore be more vulnerable to more serious drug and alcohol misuse or exploitation in relation to drug trafficking and County Lines. The child or young person you are caring for will continue to need your care and support. If you have any drug or alcohol related concerns about the child or young person you are caring for please speak with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker who will support you to positively manage this, including arranging additional support if this is necessary.

Below are government guidelines about children drinking alcohol:

[https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/alcohol-and-the-law/the-law-on-alcohol- and-under-18s/](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/alcohol-and-the-law/the-law-on-alcohol-and-under-18s/)

Child Exploitation

Child exploitation is a form of child abuse. It is where a person or group forces a child into doing something for them, by coercion, deception or manipulation. The child often trusts the person exploiting them, and may be being exploited even if they appear to agree to the activity. They may be scared of what will happen if they do not do what their abuser says.

Sometimes, young people themselves are used to exploit other children. This means they are used by an adult to encourage others to take part in harmful activities. It is important to understand that these young people are themselves victims.

Child exploitation can take many forms, including Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Radicalisation and Financial Abuse.

Child Criminal Exploitation

Child criminal exploitation is the involvement of young people in criminal activity is a common form of child exploitation. This might include involvement in county lines. This is a term used to describe the activity of gangs involved in drug dealing around the country. Those involved in county lines are likely to exploit young people to move, store and sell drugs around the country. Young people may be trafficked to houses in different parts of the country in order to work for a gang involved in county lines. They may be involved in the production of cannabis or forced begging.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Child sexual exploitation is when someone (the perpetrator) takes advantage of a difference in power. They use this to then force, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual activity. This may be in exchange for something the child needs or wants. This could be food, drugs, alcohol, a gift, money, affection or a place to stay, for example. Or could be done to help the perpetrator gain money or status.

It often starts with a perpetrator doing things to gain a young person's trust. This is called 'grooming'. Any child or young person could be the victim of child sexual exploitation, regardless of their background or gender. However, perpetrators may often target young people who they think are struggling or vulnerable in some way. For example, a young person in care, appears isolated or who is being bullied.

Sexual exploitation does not always involve physical activity. It can occur through online abuse. And a child may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity

appears consensual. The government has published guidance about [Child Sexual Exploitation](#). This is for anyone working with children, and their families. It aims to help them understand child sexual exploitation and how to help and support children who are victims.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is a process through which someone comes to support extremist beliefs. Extremist beliefs are vocal or active opposition to key British values including: the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. The influence of those with extremist views on young people can also be a form of child exploitation.

Financial Abuse

This is where a young person's bank account is used for money laundering. The person exploiting the young person hides money from crime ('proceeds from crime') in the young person's account. The person exploiting the child then accesses the funds later.

Other examples include a property being rented in the name of a young person for their abuser to use. This could be as a base for criminal activity such as drug dealing. If rent is not paid, the young person gets into debt. This affects their future financial independence.

The above information has been taken from Family Rights Group website. For more information and support on child exploitation please visit the website at: [Helping families Helping children - Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](#)

If you are worried about a child, you are looking after or are being asked to look after, seek support from your supervising social worker. There is training available for foster carers and information on the Somerset Children's Safeguarding Board which is helpful including the CSE Quick Guide Booklet which you can access using the following links:

<https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/>
<https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/working-with-children/cse-protocols/>

For more information and support in relation to exploitation of children in relation to drugs, please visit escapeline:

Escapeline is a charity committed to the prevention of child exploitation in the South West of England. They offer training and education for children and professionals across the South West, as well as advocacy and support for those impacted by exploitation.

Preparing a Child for Independence and Adulthood

Children are preparing for adult life throughout their childhood through opportunities provided for them by their parents, carers, and other adults to try and learn new things. Foster carers have a vital role in helping children develop skills and experiences that will equip them for adult life. Foster carers should enable children's development by involving them in household tasks when able and in a fun way and encouraging them to look after themselves. You can help children incrementally as they get older to learn about money and budgeting, cooking, personal care and learning important relationship skills through role modelling and helping them try things within safe perimeters. Importantly we all need the opportunity to make mistakes and feel safe and secure enough to "have another go".

Most young people are not equipped to live independently until they are past the age of 18, and it's important that young people do not feel that they have to leave home at that age. Our priority is to support young people to continue to live with you until they are ready to move into independence successfully. So, it's a delicate balance with older children of helping them learn the skills that they need without giving them a sense that we are working through a list of things they need to know so that we can ask them to leave home.

Each child and each foster family is different and you should use your supervision sessions with your supervising social worker, and discussions with the child's social worker to support you in getting this balance right.

Staying Put

Staying Put is an arrangement whereby a child remains with their current foster care family, post 18. They must have been with their foster carer for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14.

The Staying Put arrangement allows them to continue to receive the consistent and familiar support of their carer and promotes a smoother and more prepared transition into adult life and independence, through:

- the development of the necessary independent living skills
- the development of emotional resilience, building self-esteem
- the development of financial capability and budgeting
- the establishment of positive relationships and social networks
- the ability to access and maintain education, training or employment opportunities and maximise their potential.

The arrangement is also intended to help the young person plan their move to suitable and sustainable accommodation when they are ready to do so.

The Staying Put arrangement will not suit every care leaver or foster family, but it must be considered as an option in every child's pathway plan.

Discussions with all parties about whether Staying Put at 18 is the most appropriate option for the young person should start as early as possible, ideally before the young person reaches the age of 16. An early decision will enhance the young person's sense of stability and it will allow time to make the necessary arrangements for a secure and stable placement.

The carer(s) will be offered the training and support they need to ensure that they are able to help the young person develop their independence skills.

At the age of 18, the responsibility of supporting the Young Person will transfer from their Social Worker to a Leaving Care Worker.

An allowance will continue to be paid to the carer(s), but the amount will be adjusted to take into account the young person's contributions, benefits or education allowance received by the young person and the reduction in required expenditure. It will include an amount to cover the young person's rent.

For more information on Staying Put arrangements, speak to your supervising social worker, and see Staying Put Policy.

Endings of Care in Fostering Families

Endings of care should, whenever possible, end in a planned way in accordance with the plan for the child/young person. This will often be a return to family members or to permanent care through adoption, permanent fostering, or special guardianship. The transition from your care to the child's new home should be carefully planned with the social worker and follow the child's pace. It is important for the child that they do not feel either rejected by you or that they feel guilty for leaving you. Therefore, there should be introductions and the child should see you positively supporting their new carers/family and them in the transition. You may well need a need for additional emotional support at this time as you will have your own feelings to manage associated with loss and change.

Sometimes, and sadly, arrangements end in an unplanned way which is traumatic for the child and carer. It is important that in these circumstances we find a way to positively move forward with a "wishing you well" visits where possible. All carers are

expected to write a positive letter or card to each child they care for more than one week which highlights what they did in their time with the carer and their family, what was fun, and what the carer will remember. Your supervising social worker will help you with this.

Foster carers are expected to provide adequate clothing for the child to go to their new home, and luggage in which to transport it.

When a child has been living with carers for 12 months or more or has been matched with them for any length of time and this ends in an unplanned way, it is important for everyone involved to understand what has happened and learn lessons for the future.

A 'Learning from Endings' report will be completed by an independent person, not involved in planning for the child, from the Quality Assurance Service. They will speak to you and other people involved in the decision making as well as with the child, to reflect on what went well, as well as gaining an understanding of any lessons to be learnt.

Allegations against Foster Carers

Sometimes Foster Carers or other members of the fostering household are faced with an allegation of abuse or neglect. Whilst we understand that these situations will be extremely distressing for carers and their families, if an allegation or complaint is received, we have a duty in these circumstances to investigate thoroughly what has been said.

"An allegation is an assertion from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has, or may have, behaved in a way that has harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children."

Information taken from [Allegations | The Fostering Network](#)

All allegation investigations are overseen by a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and undertaken in line with Somerset's Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures [Allegations Management – SSCP \(safeguardingsomerset.org.uk\)](#). For more information on the allegations process and the LADO's role, please see [LADO-Allegations-Information-for-FOSTER-CARERS.pdf \(safeguardingsomerset.org.uk\)](#).

During the allegations process, a multi-agency strategy meeting will be held within 2 days of the initial allegation being made, to plan how (and if appropriate) an

investigation should be undertaken, and whether that is led by Children's Social Care and or the police. A decision will also need to be made about whether the child concerned, and any other children, are safe to remain in your care whilst enquiries are made. Most investigations are carried out by the Local Authority.

The investigation will be undertaken by a social worker or manager from another area and you will continue to be supported through the process by your supervising social worker. You are entitled to free legal advice and representation through your membership with Foster Talk. If deemed appropriate, your supervising social worker will also offer you the opportunity to be separately supported through an Independent social worker through Foster Talk.

Following an investigation, a Fostering Review will be held and then all the information will be presented to Fostering Panel. The Fostering Review is an opportunity to not only discuss the allegation and its impact, but also to reflect on what has gone well in the fostering task and give a balanced overview. Your Independent Support social worker can support you through the review and Fostering Panel.

If you are concerned that someone else has harmed the child you are caring for, or the child may be at risk of harm, or a criminal offence has been committed. You must report it to your Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker immediately. If you are unable to contact them, you should report it to the Emergency Duty Team as soon as possible.

Complaints

Sometimes complaints and grumbles are made by children or adults about the care a foster carer is giving. They can often arise from a misunderstanding or poor communication. If a complaint is made about you this will be resolved where possible through a discussion with your supervising social worker or potentially their team manager.

You also have the right to complain about the service you are receiving as a carer or on behalf of a child. Where possible these should be resolved directly with the person concerned, but if the issue is not resolved Somerset have a complaints procedure.

[Complaints, comments, compliments \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/complaints-comments-compliments)

Useful Contacts

East Fostering Team	01749 822943
West Fostering Team	01823 357433
FA&ST	FAST1@Somerset.gov.uk
Foster Carer Support Line out of hours	01823 358192
EDT/ First Response	0300 123 2327
SCIL (training)	01823 357977
Foster Talk	01527 836 910 or www.fostertalk.org
Foster Care Association	SFCA@somerset.gov.uk
Somerset Direct	0300 123 2224
Child Looked After Nurse	07899064759 / 07741092613
Virtual School	VirtualSchool@somerset.gov.uk
Foster Carer Payments	01823 357828
Care First	0800 174319

Useful Links

Below is a list of links you may find useful:

Somerset County Council

www.somerset.gov.uk

Fostering Website

www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

FosterTalk

www.fostertalk.org

Children and Families Learning and Development

<http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/children-and-families-learning-and-development/>

Education Support Services

<https://www.somerset.org.uk/Pages/Welcome.aspx>

Department for Education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

The South West Child Protection Procedures,

<https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/>

Somerset Care Councils – SiCC and SLCC

<https://www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk/>

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards

[Fostering services: national minimum standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards)

Foster Carer's Charter

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foster-carers-charter>

CAFCASS

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/>

Somerset Safeguarding Children

Partnership

<http://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/>

Mind of my own

<http://mindofmyown.org.uk/>