

Lancashire County Council
Directorate for Children and Young People

Baby-Sitting Policy for Foster Carers

INTRODUCTION

Arrangements for baby-sitting children who are fostered should be made with the usual care that any good parent would have. This means careful selection of sitters, ensuring a sitter can care for a child properly and is aware of the child's needs and of the expectations of the carers. The baby-sitter should be informed of any special needs or health needs. No baby-sitter can be under 16 years of age. Where a baby-sitter is under 18 years of age they should have access to a responsible adult for advice/assistance in an emergency. Sitters should always be made aware of and required to abide by the "rules of the house" including the no-smacking rule.

CHECKS ON CARERS - VETTING

Those baby-sitting for children in foster care should normally have been subject to the usual vetting checks. Foster carers may have identified family members or friends who can offer regular baby-sitting for children looked after. This may have happened at the time of assessment and approval of the carers when all adults with regular contact will be vetted, or at a later date. The Local Authority carries out police and Local Authority checks for such adults. Foster carers should normally use this pool of carers for baby-sitting. However, if on occasion this is not possible because of an emergency or the unavailability of the sitters (for example at a family function where time does not permit the usual vetting process) then non-vetted sitters can be used.

Where there are proposed changes to the regular baby-sitters that carers use, the foster carer must notify these details to the supervising social worker and the child's social worker at an early stage. The new carers should not be used until the vetting process has been completed, other than in an emergency.

Sitters should always be known to and trusted by the foster carer and be known to the child. Where arrangements to use non-vetted sitters are made the child's social worker or the supervising social worker should be notified within 24 hours of the arrangement. This enables accurate records to be maintained of arrangements made for children's care. Foster carers will also need to update their own written record of all baby-sitting arrangements. Parents and those with parental responsibility may also need to be made aware of regular arrangements. The child's social worker or the supervising social worker will advise regarding this.

Where a baby-sitting arrangement requires the baby-sitter to stay overnight in the foster carer's home, the carer should only use vetted carers and should be satisfied that the arrangement is safe and the baby-sitter suitably responsible.

GOOD PRACTICE

- It may be that the child's birth family or friendship networks can provide a sitter who would be familiar to the child. The usual requirements for vetting would apply.
- It may be that another foster carer may be able to help or even a reciprocal arrangement made.
- The sitter should always know how long the carer plans to be absent and it is the responsibility of the foster carer to provide written contact details for emergencies.
- The foster carer should choose someone to baby-sit who shares their own standards and approach to looking after children.
- The baby-sitter must agree to maintain confidentiality about the child.
- The baby-sitter should be informed about the child's routine, any behaviour management issues and likes and dislikes.
- The proposed frequency of any baby-sitting arrangements must take account of the child's needs. For example, some children may be adversely affected by frequent changes in routine and this must be considered when arrangements are made.

CHOOSING A BABY-SITTER

When choosing a baby-sitter consideration should be given to the following in relation to an individual child:

- How long the child has been in placement
- How well the child knows the proposed baby-sitter
- The age and experience of the baby-sitter
- The complexity of the child's needs
- How vulnerable the child is, including any factors as outlined within the child's behaviour management plan
- Any risks the child may pose, including any factors as outlined within the child's risk assessment
- The child's own wishes and feelings
- The views of the child's parents (if appropriate)
- Any health needs of the child

BABY-SITTING COSTS

Foster carers will be expected to pay for baby-sitting arrangements which are made for their own leisure or social arrangements. Foster carers will be reimbursed when a carer is attending a training session.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER WHO BABY SIT

Children/young people should not baby-sit until they have reached the age of 16. Once they have reached the age of 16 they can baby-sit, subject to an assessment of suitability by their social worker. The carer should visit the person who has asked the young person to baby-sit, to ensure the arrangements are suitable.

If it is proposed that a young person aged over 16 baby-sits for children within the foster home or for other children who are looked after, then he or she will be subject to the usual vetting process. The young person's social worker will further assess their suitability, in liaison with social workers for the other children and discussion with the young person and the foster carer.

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