Norfolk County Council

Procedure

Foster carer confidentiality and information technology (IT) generated files

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1. Introduction

1. As members of the team around the child, foster carers are provided with confidential information about the children in their care, and the families of those children.

2. Foster carers also create their own electronic files relating to children in their care, ranging from photographs and video images through to the daily recording they are required to undertake according to National Minimum Standards.

3. Foster Carers are not employed by NCC and are consequently not provided with equipment such as laptops, smart phones or mobile telephones that would enable them to process electronic files in the same secure way as other colleagues in the team around the child.

4. This policy highlights the key principles to be adhered to when considering the safest way to store and share electronic files and sets out the procedure that should be followed in order to comply with the policy.

2. Storing Information Technology (IT) Generated Files

1. IT files made accessible to a foster carer by NCC before and during a placement of a looked after child MUST NEVER BE STORED on any computer equipment belonging to the foster carer or a member of their family. These files will be sent to the foster carer by NCC employees using the council's encrypted email system or via the Portal.

2. Foster carers are asked by NCC to provide written accounts/reports relating to the children in their care via the Portal or encrypted emails.

3. Keeping memories

Family life is, among other things, full of pleasures, memories and fun. For fostering families, the taking of photographs may have additional significance as one of the

expectations on all carers is that they assist the child in keeping a record of their lives which may often be fragmented and go otherwise unrecorded.

Photographs are often documenting a child's progress in placement marking significant milestones or everyday memories, that could be enjoyed later when children are older.

For foster carers the taking, storage and display of photographs leads to issues being raised. The subject in the viewfinder is a child whose status is sensitive and whose parents may well not be present at the time. Both the security of the child and the feelings of the parents will need to be borne in mind. Things such as image ownership and consent are issues that none of us would normally need to think about in everyday life. For carers these are among a number of points which they will need to attend to.

Where there are safety concerns, foster carers need to be more alert to the dangers of images getting seen by those not involved in the child's care arrangements.

This guidance is not designed to get in the way of spontaneity and fun inherent in most family homes and foster carers should not feel unreasonably constrained but rather trust that their common sense concurs with what the agency would hope for.

1. Taking Photographs

If there are known to be significant issues relating to photography, it is important that these are raised by the child's Social Worker or the child's birth parents as part of the placement planning meeting or Looked after children's reviews.

A prime consideration in the taking of photographs is the respect of the views of the child in question. If a child or young person declines, it should not be assumed that this is merely normal shyness which the person with the camera can choose to ignore. Cameras may well have unpleasant connotations for the child in their previous placements. However, many children enjoy having their picture taken and this should also be taken into account.

Foster carers should adhere to the principles set out in the Safer Care Agreement (see Safer Care Policy). No child should be photographed in revealing clothes, their underwear or undressed. Nor should a child be photographed in the bath. Bedtime and bath time may have strong significance to a child who may have been abused in such situations in the past. It would also lead to the carer being vulnerable to allegations of malpractice.

2. My Norfolk Story

This is crucial work often involving photographs. It may also involve requesting foster carers to take photographs for the work being undertaken. Whether you are asked or not, you should always assume that when a child comes into your home to be fostered, it is important that they leave with pictures that can represent both a record of his time with you and a contribution to their memory box that can be of lifelong benefit.

The general principle should be that images are kept under supervision and that these should not be removed from, or copies taken outside, the foster home.

3. Professional Photos

Community groups/schools are very much part of everyday life for some children and their foster families. These are likely to involve photographs and foster carers should be alert to any possible problems which may occur. Foster carers should seek advice from children's social workers if they feel unable to give permission for these.

4. Storage of Photographic Images

4.1 All foster carers understand the duty they are under to treat information about the child they are looking after with the utmost discretion. The recording of an image should also be viewed as a piece of confidential information. Care should therefore be taken in the storage of photographic images of foster children, whether these are in the form of digital files or printed material, whether on cameras, smart phones, computers or in albums. (devices will need to be password protected)

4.2 Images should not be kept on websites that are available to those outside of the foster family. This includes social media sites of all kinds.

Carers should advise foster children of the implications of displaying images of themselves on the internet and the reduced privacy that this leads to.

When using various photograph online services, please read their privacy statement and do not give authorization for the photographs to be used for marketing or commercial purposes.

5. When a Placement Finishes

5.1 Foster carers should carefully consider what they will do with photos of family events which include formerly looked after children. The situation should be discussed with the supervising Social Worker. It will be necessary to take into account the views of the fostering family, who may wish to retain a few significant photographs reflecting the role the fostered child played in the family. However, special care should be taken of such images to protect the privacy of the formerly placed child concerned. It would be generally inappropriate to keep a significant number of images. Similarly the display in the foster home of a formerly fostered child's photograph should be avoided or discussed with your Supervising Social Worker.

5.2 In the event of photographs needing to be disposed of, they should be passed to the Supervising Social Worker in the same way that written documents are.

5.3 Care should be taken to delete images from memory cards or sticks and to ensure that any portable media with images, such as CD ROMs or DVDs, memory sticks are kept within the home. Any PC or portable device with a memory should be reviewed with files being deleted before being disposed of or passing on the equipment. If a foster carer becomes aware that a camera, prints or electronic storage device has been stolen or is missing, this should be reported to Children's Social worker as soon as possible.

6. Other Information

If foster carers are in any doubt about the general question of taking photographs of children in their care, they should talk about the specific issues which concern them with either their Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker who will act on behalf of the agency and/or the birth parents.

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