

## **Practice guidance for staff: Signs of Safety and Foster Care**

Author: Peter Ronan

Title: Head of Social Work Resources

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### **Supporting children within foster care**

#### **Background**

All children need a sense of security, of wellbeing and of belonging to a family. For children living in foster placements this stability is provided by their foster family and the significance of this relationship should never be minimised.

Research is clear that there is a link between placement stability and achievement for Looked after Children. We know that the more settled and secure a child is the better they do in respect of their education, their ability to build secure and safe relationships and in respect of their long term outcomes. Norfolk performance in terms of placement stability (\*% of children who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years, have been in the same placement for the last 2 years or placed for adoption) is better than the national or statistical neighbours average. However, in 2013/14, our performance dropped from 71% to 68%, a decrease in performance against the national and statistical neighbour trend.

Within Norfolk we are examining the way we approach our work with children their families, partner agencies and foster carers and looking at how we can make it the best it can be. This has included signing up to the Signs of Safety. We are committed to using this approach across all of our work including the way that we work with Looked after Children and their networks including their foster carers. The aim of this different approach is to ensure that we are doing all that we can to listen to children and carers to ensure we are offering support and help at the point the child and carer need it.

Disruptions to foster placement occur for many different reasons. Research tells us that some of the factors that affect the likelihood of a disruption are:

- The stage of the placement (i.e. a disruption is more likely early in the placement)
- The age of the child (risk increasing with age)
- A child who has had previous moves
- Poor placement planning and poor matching
- Poor levels of support to the child and \ or carer.

When foster placements disrupt, research tells us that foster carers and social workers frequently disagree about who was mainly responsible for the disruption, which problem combined to end the placement and over which course the troubled waters ran. The various parties in disrupted placements also disagree, on many occasions, as to what should have been done to prevent the final split up of children and their foster carers.

For the child who may feel powerless and very scared within such a scenario professional disagreement does not assist them to feel secure and stable.

### Signs of Safety support planning meetings

Signs of safety can be used in all our work and should inform all planning and assessment.

To ensure that we are working in the best possible way to support children within their placements which will in turn avoid disruptions, a Signs of Safety approach should be used to engaging with the foster family and the child. If there is concern that the placement may be at risk of breaking down a piece of work will take place between the foster carer, the child and key agencies including the child and carer's social workers taking a signs of safety approach.

### Signs of Safety Practice tools

It is critically important to understand the voice of the child and to this end, the direct work tools in Signs of Safety (the 3 houses etc.) should be used to ensure the child's voice is heard.

To ensure that placements are given the best possible chance of being appropriately supported the relevant Head of Social Work for the area will chair a planning meeting which will use the signs of safety approach. This will be recorded on the [mapping template](#). Only in very exceptional circumstances (which may include where allegations have been made but this will depend on the seriousness, nature and complexity of the allegation \ situation) will children and young people be moved without a planning support meeting.

If a child needs to be moved from a long term/permanent foster placement without a planning meeting as outlined above the disruption meeting will take account of the information using a signs of safety approach.

The support planning meeting can be instigated by either the child's social work team, the fostering team, the IRO or by request of the child/young person or foster carer.

The timescale for the meeting will be set by the child's social work team manager and should be completed within a maximum of 30 days. The planning meeting will take place at the end of the work but can be called at any time during the process if the matter becomes urgent.

Discussion and thought should be given to the 'What needs to happen' section and scaling but this will be the focus of the meeting.

## **LAC Reviews**

This process does not interfere with the statutory requirements in relation to LAC reviews. Children should not be moved from placements without a LAC review and the IRO should always be consulted within the process.

## **Planning**

The meeting agenda will be as follows:

- Introductions
- What's working well
- What are we worried about
- Scaling. On a scale of 0 – 10. 0 being that the placement is at high risk of disruption. 10 being the child's needs are being met, the placement is stable and will continue with all parties' agreement
- The Chair will use the EARS (Elicit, Amplify, Reflect, and Start Over) conversation to assure an appreciative meeting. At the end of the meeting, the planning meeting will be recorded by the chair on the [mapping template](#). Where possible, copies should be distributed at the meeting or within two working days by the Chair
- The meeting will focus on what additional support can be offered in order to assist this child and foster family within this placement
- There needs to be a clear note of all decisions and of any dissenting opinions

Please note, no placement can be ended by Children's Services without a Planning meeting, appropriate consultations and a LAC review. The final decision to end a placement rests with an Assistant Director. Where a placement needs to end in an emergency (whether an allegation has been made or not) the relevant Assistant director should be consulted.

Need for meeting identified by team manager or foster carer



Team manager agrees timescale with tier 4 manager  
(not longer than 30 days)



Child's social worker and foster carer's social worker work with child, foster carer and all other parties to arrange meeting and understand what's working well and what are we worried about



Child's social worker agrees invite list with child, foster carer and tier 4 manager and invites are sent out



Signs of safety planning meeting