



the skills to foster assessment

assessing foster carers a social worker's guide

the fostering network
the voice of foster care



Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>The Skills to Foster Assessment</i>	7
<i>Outlining the skills</i>	13
<i>Planning the assessment</i>	29
<i>Evidence and information</i>	35
<i>The assessor's toolkit</i>	45
<i>Preparing for panel</i>	51
<i>Safer caring</i>	61
<i>Checks and references</i>	67
<i>Adapting the assessment</i>	75
<i>Foster panels</i>	81
<i>Tips for a successful assessment</i>	87
<i>Appendix 1: Links</i>	91
<i>Appendix 2: Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care</i>	99
<i>Appendix 3: The Skills to Foster pre-approval training</i>	108
<i>Appendix 4: Further resources</i>	110

Introduction

Foster care is now recognised as a fundamental resource in achieving better outcomes for children in public care. The aims of the assessment process for foster carers, therefore, are to ensure that applicants have the potential to provide a safe and nurturing environment to vulnerable children and young people and to develop a fostering workforce with the necessary qualities, aptitudes and skills to undertake the demanding and complex tasks now required of it.

These assessment materials are a successor to the competency-based assessment process produced by the Fostering Network in 2000. They build upon the good practice and advice of those materials and include a revised structure and format for the assessment process based upon new requirements and legislation, including the *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care* (TSD Standards) in England. They now combine the task-centred method of assessment with analysis of the applicant's social history, family dynamics and motivations to foster to produce a more comprehensive approach than ever before.

In this model, the competencies around which the earlier assessments were based have now been incorporated into a skills-based model that is both child-centred and consistent with the spirit and terminology of relevant standards and legislation across the UK. More information about this can be found in Appendix 1. This change is significant: foster carers are now considered to be members of the professional child care workforce and their preparation and induction must stand alongside that of other members of that workforce. They must meet tangible standards of practice as their skills are, ultimately, the means whereby deeply disadvantaged children are given the care they need.

The new attention to skills and their acquisition ensures that the focus of the assessment moves beyond competency to the route by which an applicant develops professional practice. In addition to demonstrating appropriate child care skills, foster carers must now be able to demonstrate their potential to work as members of the professional child care team, be willing and able to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, and to take responsibility for their own self-development.

This new assessment process takes account of the above points while also building on the relevant sections in *The Skills to Foster* pre-approval training. As such, the process provides an integrated approach to assessment and pre-approval training which allows assessors to examine the suitability of the applicant to foster and build a comprehensive and relevant portfolio of evidence for the panel to consider.

This assessment process will not only make it easier for potential foster carers to use their previous experience to demonstrate their current knowledge position, but it will also highlight areas for future growth and learning. The assessment portfolio will then become a development portfolio, meaning foster carers can begin to compile evidence of their abilities and development even before they are approved.

Links

In producing this new assessment model, the Fostering Network has also taken account of the previous competency-based assessment as detailed in the *Codes of Practice* and endorsed by the *UK National Standards for Foster Care* (UKNS) produced in 1999. The UKNS are still the standard bearer for fostering services to aspire to. They remain important in underpinning this new assessment process despite the fact that, unlike fostering standards produced since 2002, they have no formal legal status. They represent best practice and continue to be relevant and should be fully complied with by fostering service providers.

In addition, we have mapped *The Skills to Foster Assessment* to standards and legislation in each of the four countries in the UK. For full details please refer to Appendix 1.

Fostering services in England can map the assessment to the *Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*. Cross references are given on the **assessment report form** in this guide, and the Matrix tool can be used to record evidence collected during the assessment that can also be used to evidence the *TSD Standards*. Full details in Appendix 2.

Terminology

Foster carers

The Fostering Network uses the term 'foster carer' and never 'foster parent', 'foster mother' or 'foster father'. This is because the role of a foster carer is not to replace a child's parent(s). It is a professional and distinct role. For the same reasons, we refer to 'parent' 'mother' or 'father' rather than 'birth' or 'natural' parents.

Fostering service

We use the term 'fostering service' to refer to any organisation that assesses, approves and places children with foster carers.

Public authority

By 'public authority' we mean either a local authority (in England, Wales and Scotland) or a Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland.

Supervising social worker

For clarity we refer consistently to 'supervising social workers' rather than 'link workers', 'family placement workers' or other similar job titles.

Sons and daughters of foster carers

We refer to other children in the foster home as the 'sons and daughters of foster carers'. This term includes grandchildren, adopted children and children in long-term foster care. We do not use the term 'children who foster' as this implies responsibility for the fostering task, which should not be the role of other young people in the household.

Applicant

Throughout this guide, the term 'applicant' has been used to refer to single and joint applicants within the same household.

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Chapter 1

The Skills to Foster Assessment

About *The Skills to Foster Assessment*

The Skills to Foster assessment materials will ensure consistent, high quality assessments of potential foster carers. The process is designed to be both adaptable and easy to use for assessors.

When we talk about 'skills', this covers the abilities, experience, aptitudes, attitudes and personal qualities of potential foster carers.

Values underpinning the Skills approach

The skills approach ensures that the values listed here are integral to the assessment process.

- Child safety is paramount.
- Individuals are respected.
- Difference and diversity is valued.
- Equality is promoted.
- Discrimination is challenged.
- Confidentiality is maintained.
- Advice and feedback are provided in a constructive way.
- Applicant(s) are supported to demonstrate their skills.
- Standards of child care are explicit and agreed.



Tools to deliver the assessment

There is a range of materials available to help you complete the assessment. This guide, designed for assessing social workers and their team managers, explains *The Skills to Foster Assessment* and how it works. It sets out how to complete the assessment, gives advice and tips on a good assessment, and identifies sources of information and evidence. The appendices provide the links to legislation and standards across the UK.

There is also a guide for applicants: *The Skills to Foster: an applicant's guide to the assessment process*, which will help potential foster carers understand the process and begin to identify evidence of their skills and knowledge.

Finally, the CD-Rom contains the final assessment report form, as well as an assessor's toolkit.

In addition, training is available for social workers carrying out the assessment to help them develop their practice in collecting and analysing evidence, producing a well-written report and making the most of the supporting tools. For further details, contact the Fostering Network (details on back cover).

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Collecting evidence

The *Skills* approach requires evidence of an applicant's skills and knowledge to be collected from a number of sources and in different forms. Evidence might include:

- observation of the applicant interacting with children
- an interview with the parent of a child an applicant has cared for
- an employer's reference
- notes made by trainers from *The Skills to Foster* pre-approval training sessions
- notes made by the applicant from *The Skills to Foster* pre-approval training sessions
- completed activities in *The Skills to Foster: Record and Resource Book*
- social worker's records of discussion with the applicant
- the applicant's reflections on a DVD they have watched about families of fostered children and young people.

In the next chapter, we give examples of evidence that could be collected for each of the skills covered by the assessment. These lists are not exhaustive, but are intended to provide suggestions of how to validate statements made by applicants. One piece of evidence may be cross-referenced to a number of skills areas .

It is important to remember that the role of the assessing social worker is to analyse the evidence as well as collect it.

The portfolio

Evidence should be collected and kept together in a 'portfolio'. The term 'portfolio' can be off-putting but, if viewed as a developmental tool and tailored to the needs of the individual, it can be a useful record of assessment. It would seem practical to continue to build on this portfolio to evidence the completion of the *TSD Standards* (in England) and any future training or qualification which requires supporting evidence in a portfolio format.

The assessment report form

The assessment report form pulls together all of the work and evidence from the assessment and presents an analysis of this information, along with a recommendation, in a useful format for the panel.

The form has seven sections, as follows:

Cover sheet and contents

The cover sheet summarises the key information about the applicants and gives a quick 'pen picture'. The second part of this section gives the contents of the report and the portfolio.

Checks and references

This section summarises all the checks carried out by the assessor and documents the references sought and collected.

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Family profile

This section gives more information about the family, their home and what they can offer a fostered child. This section of the form is designed so that it can be used separately and distributed for matching purposes.

Summary of assessment process

This section is a record of the assessment process, to aid the assessor in recording progress that will demonstrate to the panel that all required actions have been taken.

Details of family members and household

This section records details of other members of the household and the applicant's own children, either living with them or separately. It also allows the assessor to record other regular visitors to the household and details of the applicant's support network.

The Skills assessment

This is the core part of the assessment and will allow the assessor to evidence and analyse the applicant's skills, abilities, knowledge and experience in relation to the fostering task. Statements about an applicant's skills and abilities must be substantiated by evidence and examples given. For more detail on the skills covered by the assessment, see Chapter 2.

Assessor's summary and recommendations

This section allows the assessor to summarise the applicant's skills and qualities, as well as identify any areas for development, before giving a final recommendation. The panel's recommendation is also recorded on this part of the form before the whole report is passed to the fostering service's decision maker.

Assessors need to show how they have considered the information about applicants to form an opinion about suitability. Each skill should be addressed separately in the report, although individual pieces of evidence may be relevant to more than one skill.

The report form also details the gaps in the applicant's skills and knowledge and makes recommendations for future training and development. There should be an acknowledgment that while the applicant comes with various experiences and previous knowledge, they will not know everything about fostering and there will be a number of skills they will need to develop over time.

The form is supplied on CD-Rom in Microsoft Word format, so it can be adapted by your fostering service if required.

Assessor's toolkit

In order to achieve uniformity in assessments (which will ensure consistent standards and help panels), fostering services should encourage assessors to use standard tools. On *The Skills to Foster Assessment* CD-Rom there is a series of forms and sample letters that can

be used to ensure that each stage of the assessment process is carried out rigorously and consistently. These are:

Information gathering and planning

- Registration of interest form.
- Application form/s (in two parts).
- Record of initial feedback.
- Assessment planning form.
- Chronology.
- Example letter inviting applicants to pre-approval training.
- *The Skills to Foster* training feedback form.
- Checklist for panel.
- Information checklist.

Checks and references

- Example letter to personal referees.
- Personal reference form.
- Support network interview form.
- Example letter to employer.
- Employer's reference form.
- Example letter to health visitor.
- Example letter to school.
- Example letter to GP.



Reports and evidence

- Record of observation.
- Health and safety checklist.
- Pet questionnaire.
- Matrix summarising evidence of skills.
- Portfolio evidence contents list.
- Example eco-map.

Guidance on using these tools can be found in Chapter 5.

Assessment for specific needs

The main assessment report form identifies core skills for foster carers. However, fostering has become increasingly specialised, and assessments for specific types of fostering may require a different focus.

The form is designed to be adaptable and flexible, so you can tailor it to the needs of a particular type of fostering if required. Guidance on how to do this can be found in Chapter 9. This approach means that it is possible to address issues pertinent to individuals as well as those skills that are needed by all foster carers.

Continuing to assess skills following approval

The CD-Rom also contains a selection of forms that can be used to ensure a consistent and successful approach to the ongoing professional development plans for foster carers. One form will help you to draw up an initial personal development plan following on from the assessment, the other is for annual reviews of the personal development plan.

The aim is to achieve an ongoing process of review, learning and development for each foster carer throughout their fostering career.

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Chapter 2

Outlining the *Skills*

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The Skills to Foster assessment method is designed to highlight the applicant's skills, abilities, qualities and previous experiences that are relevant to the fostering task. It also allows for the identification of areas that require further training, acknowledging that, at this stage, applicants will not be fully versed in all aspects of the role. A number of skills are specific to fostering and will not have been experienced by the majority of people who have not previously looked after a child in public care.

This chapter outlines the skills identified as necessary to the fostering role and sets out how the assessor can identify and evidence these skills. The skills assessment is part of the assessment report form.

Assessing social workers should read this chapter carefully before carrying out an assessment to ensure they understand the requirements of the skills assessment and how they can be met.

About the applicant

Life experiences

This section allows the assessor to analyse and explore the events in the applicant's life that has made them into the person they are.

The first section asks for an outline of the personal history of each applicant, highlighting their experiences of being parented and parenting, exploring any relationships or events which have had a significant influence on them.

Applicants need to demonstrate an understanding of how their own upbringing and personal past experiences influence their attitudes and their behaviour in respect of bringing up children. Exploring an applicant's experiences of previous relationships, whether positive or negative, is a useful way of identifying their values and attitudes to family life and relationships.

This section should also include the applicant's employment history, their current employment status and whether they are financially stable. Has the applicant moved house frequently or do they have any unexplained gaps in their accommodation or employment history in the chronology? If so, these must be thoroughly explored and fully explained.

By addressing such questions, the assessor will be able to build a picture of the applicant to demonstrate that they have an established and secure lifestyle and are therefore less likely to present a risk to children.

It is not necessary to provide an account of the applicant's life story. The skill of the assessing social worker here is to provide an overview and pull out the relevant details.

Attitudes and aptitudes

This section allows the assessor to give their interpretation and evaluation of the applicant or applicants as people. It should also include issues such as how the applicant sees themselves, their membership of any groups, political or religious bodies and any strongly held views.

Is the applicant physically, mentally and emotionally well? Will they have the resilience and 'stickability' to persevere with fostering or with a particular child? To do this, assessors will

need to refer back to the previous account of the applicant's experiences and how they have dealt with these.

If you use activities to identify each individual's 'attachment type' as part of the assessment process, then this would be the appropriate place to discuss this. The aim is to provide a picture of how the applicant builds relationships and the personal qualities that they will bring to the fostering task.

The following activities in the *Record and Resource Book* can help shape useful conversations with the applicant(s): 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 4.2 and 4.7.

Motivation

The question of why applicant(s) have come forward to foster is crucial, and this section ensures that their reasons are identified. It should also include an appraisal of the motivation behind the applicant's desire to foster. This should come both from the reasons given in interviews and the assessor's analysis of their personality and situation. Any relevant comments from other interviewees and referees should also be considered.

Risk assessment

This final section gives assessors the opportunity to flag up any outstanding concerns they have regarding the applicant's suitability to foster or ability to provide a safe environment. If there are gaps in their personal history chronology, details of these should be included here. If there are concerns arising from interviews, observations or references, they should also be highlighted here.

Chapter 7 discusses assessing foster carers in relation to safer care in more detail.

The four skills assessment areas

The main part of the assessment breaks down skills into four key areas:

- 1 Understanding the role of the foster carer.
- 2 Understanding health and safety and healthy care.
- 3 Understanding children and young people.
- 4 Developing yourself.

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Each area is then broken down into the skills, experiences, knowledge, aptitudes, attitudes and abilities that should be demonstrated during the assessment. The examples given under each are not designed to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but to guide the assessor to identify the applicant's existing qualities.

To do this, the assessor needs to look at the portfolio of evidence that has been collated throughout the assessment, assess the relevant information and translate this in to a concise assessment for the panel.

The form gives space for a response under each sub-heading: this will ensure a focused approach to the assessment of how the applicant(s) can demonstrate their ability in each aspect of the foster carer role. It will also make it easier to pull out areas for development.

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If you prefer, you can address all the sub-headings in one summary at the end of each skill group. This will facilitate a more narrative approach, but will require greater discipline to ensure all points are covered.

1 Understanding the role of the foster carer

In the past many newly-approved foster carers appeared to have had unrealistic ideas about what fostering entailed and what their role should be. This section seeks to elicit the applicant's expectations, to ensure that they have a realistic understanding of the types of children they are likely to be looking after and that they understand the increasingly wide role foster carers are expected to play in the lives of the children and young people they care for.

For example, do they understand that many of the children requiring foster care have complex needs and challenging behaviour, and will they be able to alter their life to accommodate such a child? Do they understand why children and young people in foster care may not show appreciation for the quality of lifestyle their foster carers provide for them? Does the applicant understand that as a foster carer their life will be under scrutiny and they will often be expected to attend – and sometimes host – meetings? How realistic is their understanding of the foster care role?

Applicants need to demonstrate an understanding that looking after a child in public care is not the same as looking after their own children, or even a relative or friend's child, and that they are aware of the tasks required of them. They need to show an appreciation that the role is more than 'parenting'. Do they understand the impact that fostering will have on their life, and that of their family. The impact on their own sons and daughters, if they have them, will be huge. Do they appreciate this and are they equipped to cope with any difficulties that may arise?

Potential evidence:

- Interviews/discussions with the applicant).
- Interviews with referees.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Trainer's feedback from *The Skills to Foster*.
- Activity 1.7 in the *Record and Resource Book*.
- Activity 3.8 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

1.1 Child care experience and skills

Caring for children is, of course, the most important aspect of being a foster carer. What experience does the applicant have of caring for children and young people? This could be as part of a family or in a work environment. What age groups have they experience of caring for, and in what context? Can they demonstrate an understanding of meeting children's physical and emotional needs? Pay particular attention to any previous experience of working with children and young people in a professional setting, or situations in which they will have cared for children who are not theirs by birth. Experience of living in a step family (or other re-constituted family) will also be significant. Observations would be particularly useful in these situations.

Record and comment on any previous applications to foster, adopt or work with children in a professional setting.

1.1b
1.3b

Potential evidence:

- Trainers' feedback from *The Skills to Foster*.
- Discussions with applicant.
- Employer's reference.
- Observation of family interaction.
- Observation of applicant caring for children in a professional setting.
- Interviews with ex-partners/ex-spouses.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Interviews with step-children, if relevant.

1.2 Support networks

There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that many applicants claim to have a large support network during the assessment process, but when that support network is tested it is often not as robust as claimed. It must be recognised that applicants are eager to please the assessor and so may make claims about their experience or support systems which are exaggerated. For this reason, the family members and friends put forward as the applicant's support network should be interviewed in order to ascertain their understanding of what might be required of them and the level of support they are willing and able to provide.

It is preferable to have a small number of available and committed supporters who can step in at very short notice to take care of a child, rather than an army of supporters who, in reality, work full-time and would be unable to provide practical help when needed. These people may be the same as the ones asked to provide personal references for the applicant, in which case they can be asked about their involvement as part of the applicant's support network when being interviewed as a referee. Sample questions you may wish to ask a member of the applicant's support network are outlined on the CD-Rom. You may wish to ask the applicant how they have chosen their support network or what criteria they would use to judge the suitability of a babysitter.

Your assessment of the support network available should consider both practical and emotional support. What would happen if the applicant was to fall ill? Is child care available at short notice? Would there be family or friends available to offer practical assistance in the event of an emergency? Are you confident that the support network would provide the support you feel would be necessary?

Potential evidence:

- Interviews with people from the applicant's support network.
- Discussion with the applicant.

SAMPLE

1.3 Involving a fostered child's family

Applicants need to be able to work closely with children's families as well as other professionals in order to try to maintain continuity and a sense of belonging for the child. Applicants may initially be worried about allowing parents to visit their home (or even disclosing their address) but they need to be encouraged to see the importance of working with parents for the benefit of the child.

Contact is an important part of the foster carer's role. Does the applicant understand that they will need to facilitate this, face-to-face and via letter, email and telephone calls? Do they have a car to help transport children to contact visits? Or would they be happy to welcome parents into their home?

Are the applicants non-judgmental and able to relate to a cross section of society, including people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds? Does the applicant understand some of the problems faced by families that can contribute to their children needing to be looked after? Can the applicant think of ways to keep children and young people in touch with their families and how to put parents at their ease when visiting? Does the applicant present as confident but sensitive in their manner?

Do you feel confident that they will be able to work with children's families in a positive and non-judgmental way? Do you also feel confident that they will be able to do so in a way that will protect their own family, especially their own sons and daughters?

2.3a
2.3b
4.3b
5.6a

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with the applicant.
- Observation.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activities 3.3, 3.5 and 5.2 in the *Record and Resource Book*.



1.4 Confidentiality

Foster carers will receive a great deal of sensitive information about the children they care for and applicants will need to understand the importance of keeping such information confidential. This will apply to written records they keep as well as conversations they have. Does the applicant understand this necessity?

Does the applicant also understand that, when the safety of the child, or of anyone else, is at risk then it may be necessary to break confidentiality? Can they demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of when it is appropriate to share information and when it might not be?

1.4a
1.4c

Potential evidence

- Discussion with the applicant.
- Referee interviews.
- Activity 3.6 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

1.5 Working as part of a team

Increasingly, foster carers are, quite rightly, being accepted as members of the professional team around a child and are becoming more involved in care planning issues.

Is the applicant able to demonstrate their ability to put forward their opinions without coming across as dogmatic, and are they willing to work in partnership with other professionals? Can they act as an advocate for children and young people in meetings, and with schools and health care?

Do they understand it is necessary for foster carers to accept and work with social workers' plans, even when they disagree with those plans, and at the same time have an ability to challenge constructively? Have they previously served on a committee or been part of a team? Can they give practical examples of where they have been prepared to make changes or follow advice from others?

2.4a
2.4c
4.4a

Potential evidence:

- Employer's reference.
- Previous committee membership (eg PTA, sports club, etc).
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activity 3.1 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

1.6 Organised, reliable, dependable

Foster carers are now expected to be increasingly organised in their approach to the role.

Do you feel confident that the applicant will be able to juggle the varied demands of foster care, managing to attend meetings as well as ensure children are on time for schools and clubs? Have they previously had a role where they had to juggle a number of demands?

Can the applicant evidence being involved in organised activities such as sports clubs, Brownies or Scouts? If so, how will they ensure these do not impinge on their care of the child but enhance their experiences during their time in care? What plans do they have to involve fostered children in these activities? Refer to interviews with any co-organisers of children's activities and the family profile.

2.5a
2.5b

Potential evidence:

- References.
- Observation.
- Discussion with applicant.
- Interview with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Applicant's written account of a typical weekend (for profile).

SAMPLE

1.7 Promotion of equality and diversity

As far as possible, we should aim to normalise the experiences of young people who are in care; foster carers have a large part to play in helping to do this. Foster carers need to understand that fostered children and young people are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and to being treated differently from their peers.

Discuss the applicant's attitudes to gender and roles, cultural customs and practices, ethnicity and 'race', and sexuality. How would applicants demonstrate a flexible, inclusive and tolerant attitude to others of any particular origin, cultural or linguistic background? Can they give examples of when they have challenged discriminatory behaviour? What experience do they have of advocating for a young person?

What practical ways can the applicant suggest they could help a child from a different cultural background to feel positive about themselves and keep in touch with their cultural background? Do they understand that familiar food, clothing and lifestyle can help provide the emotional warmth and stability that children separated from their own family need? What examples are they able to offer that would suggest they could do this?

How do the applicant and their family celebrate religious festivals and birthdays? What would they do if they were fostering a child who did not want to be involved in these celebrations (for example, many families who do not practise a religion celebrate Christmas, but some children may not want to be a part of this)? Can they list festivals celebrated by other religions and could they promote and support a child's involvement in these?

Does the applicant require further training in this area if it is something they have no experience of? Remember, not all applicants will be able to demonstrate all skills and experiences but they should be willing to develop their understanding through training and research.

1.2b
5.8a

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with the applicant.
- Personal references.
- Employer references.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activities 2.5 and 2.10 in the *Record and Resource Book*.



1.8 Communication skills

The way an applicant communicates with their own family can be an indication of how they will try to facilitate communication with a young person in their care. How does communication work within the applicant's family, both with partners and children? Is it successful or not? How are decisions made within the family and who has the 'say' in their family? How does evidence demonstrate this?

How will the applicant seek help and support for a child who has communication difficulties? Can they identify a range of ways to help children express themselves – for example through play? How confident is the applicant in communicating with other professionals? How would they cope with saying 'no' to accepting placements outside of their approval range?

SAMPLE

4.1b
4.1c

Potential evidence:

- Interviews with applicant.
- Observation of family interaction.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Interviews with referees.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.

1.9 Literacy skills

In order to support children to achieve the most positive outcomes while in foster care, foster carers need to be confident in dealing with other professionals via a range of media.

The standard of their written and spoken English can impact on how well they can communicate with people, for example teachers and health professionals, and they are required to keep written records about the children they look after. The quality of their record keeping may protect their family from false allegations.

Asking applicants to produce a written piece describing a typical weekend in their family can serve a number of purposes. Not only can the applicant's ability to write factually, concisely and clearly be tested out in a non-threatening manner but the piece can be added to the family profile to give a good indication of the family's routines and to ensure they actively engage in leisure pursuits, sports, trips out, etc. This account can be used for matching purposes and to give a child a picture of the family prior to a placement being made.

If the applicant is not confident in communicating in writing, how will this be addressed? For example, will training be available to them? If they communicate using Braille, will your fostering service be able to facilitate this?

4.2c
4.5c

Potential evidence:

- Applicant's written account describing a typical weekend.
- Completion of written activities in the *Record and Resource Book*.

2 Understand health, safety and healthy care

2.1 Providing a suitable environment

Applicants should understand that no matter what their experiences of home life, children who are fostered will be affected by being separated from their families and losing all that is familiar to them. It is the job of the foster carer to maintain a welcoming environment and to provide a sense of security for them in the home, which includes making them familiar with the house rules and trying to accommodate the child's likes and dislikes of particular foods.

Comment on whether the home is well-maintained, safe, hygienic and clean. Refer to the health and safety checklist completed on the applicant's home, explaining any anomalies. Comment on whether the house is owned or rented, the number of bedrooms and the intended sleeping arrangements when there is a fostered child or children in place; you need to inspect this as part of your assessment and not just rely on being told there is a spare room available. You should also comment on the location of the proposed room – would there

be any implications here for safer caring, and would it be accessible to children with limited mobility?

Is there a garden or access to a safe play area? Describe the local area in terms of ethnic mix, access to amenities, shops, schools, library, public transport and any obvious dangers in the local environment.

The health and safety check carried out during the assessment is key here, but you should also comment on the applicant's commitment to the issue by addressing any problems arising from this check. You should also complete a pet questionnaire if there are any animals in the home.

3.1a
3.2a
3.2b
6.2a

Potential evidence:

- Comments from referees.
- Observations of applicant at home.
- Quotes from written work or discussion.
- Health and safety checklist.
- Pet questionnaire.

SAMPLE

2.2 Fire safety

Applicants would be well advised to seek a complementary visit from the local fire brigade who will advise on exit routes and general fire hazards in the home. In some areas they will also fit smoke alarms with a 10-year battery life (free of charge). Ensure any attic bedrooms comply with building regulations – this includes height and dimensions of opening windows, fire doors at the top and bottom of a second flight of stairs, mains operated fire alarms and handrails to the stairs (loft room building regulations can be obtained from many local council websites).

3.2c

Potential evidence:

- Home visit.
- Health and safety checklist.
- Fire brigade visit.

2.3 Healthy care

Health matters are crucial to caring for any child, and there are particular issues that may arise when fostering. Does the applicant have a good general understanding of health issues, including the importance of promoting a healthy lifestyle?

Has the applicant experienced childhood diseases within their own family and would they know how to distinguish a measles rash from childhood meningitis symptoms?

For example, have they undergone any training or are they aware of how to prevent the spread of communicable diseases? Can the applicant demonstrate an understanding of sexual health issues; are they aware of how to contact the local GUM clinic or birth control clinic? How comfortable do you think the applicant would be in discussing such issues with

SAMPLE

young people? How do they feel about doing this with their own children (if they have any) and about answering questions of a sensitive nature?

Does the applicant understand the potential health difficulties that a fostered child may face, particularly in relation to mental and emotional health and wellbeing? If they will be fostering children or young people with disabilities, do they have an understanding of the additional demands this may make on them?

3.3a
3.3c

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with, and observation, of the applicant.
- Statements from referees – particularly GPs and/or health visitors.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Previous training undertaken for other roles.
- Activity 1.7 and 2.6 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

2.4 Medical treatment

Has the applicant got a valid First Aid certificate? If not, is this training something your fostering service provides? Is the applicant and their family registered with a GP and dentist; do they understand that they must register a fostered child and support them to attend the dentist even if this is something unfamiliar to them? Do they have an understanding of the issues surrounding medical consent for children in care?

3.3d

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant(s).
- First Aid certificate.
- Reference from GP or health visitor.

2.5 Safer caring

Consideration of safer caring issues should be undertaken under all aspects of the assessment. However, under this heading, assessors should judge whether the applicant has a sufficient understanding of safer caring issues.

Do they appreciate the effect of previous abuse on caring for a child or young person? Have they begun work on a family policy to help to keep everyone in their home safe? Do they accept that changes will be necessary? In particular, have they considered the impact of this upon other people in their household, particularly their own sons and daughters?

Assessing social workers should ensure they have discussed the potential for allegations with prospective foster carers, and they should be provided with a copy of the fostering service's policy on dealing with allegations.

If the applicant has previously worked with children and young people, they may already have an understanding of safer caring issues. The learning from Session 5 of *The Skills to Foster* will be crucial. It is not adequate to say applicants have attended preparation groups and appear to have an understanding of the importance of boundaries about nudity/bathing, etc. It is important to detail the evidence there is of them being able to provide a safer environment.

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You should also consider the additional implications if the applicant will be fostering children with disabilities. There is more information about safer caring issues relating to assessment in Chapter 7.

3.4a
6.2a
6.2c
6.2d
7.1a

Potential evidence:

- Interviews with applicant.
- Employer reference.
- Interviews with the applicant's sons and daughters.
- The family's safer caring policy.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activities 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.10 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

3 Understand children and young people

3.1 Understanding development

Foster carers need to develop and promote children and young people's emotional and physical development and so must be able to recognise unusual physical or emotional development and respond appropriately. Can the applicant demonstrate an understanding of what would be expected from a child at different points in their development?

Many children in the care system have delayed development which can be due to a learning disability or to an organic cause such as foetal alcohol syndrome, or to neglect. Can the applicant give examples of activities they would encourage to promote and stimulate development? What do they understand of the difference between chronological age and stages of development and how a looked-after child may be affected?

5.1b
5.1c

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant(s).
- References.
- Interviews with the applicant's sons and daughters.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activity 4.1 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

3.2 Understanding and managing behaviour

There are judgments involved in labelling behaviour 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable'. Applicants need to understand that there may be a range of reasons underlying various behaviours and that a caring approach includes using a range of strategies to promote or discourage certain behaviours.

Is the applicant able to identify a range of behaviours and various ways of managing them? What values underlie their approach to the management of 'challenging' behaviour? Has the applicant demonstrated an ability to set appropriate boundaries with their own children and what is their attitude to using appropriate, permissive sanctions? Refer to referee interviews, observational visits, interviews with applicant's children and the family's safer care policy.

Applicants need to be aware of the fostering service's policy on permissive sanctions and understand that this will relate to their own as well as fostered children. Is the applicant aware of the risks involved in young people using mobile phones, the internet and social networking sites? Does the applicant understand that young people can make allegations against foster carers and their families, whether unfounded or not?

3.4b
3.4c

Potential evidence:

- Discussions with applicant.
- Statements from referees – particularly employers, if relevant.
- Observation of the applicant with children and young people.
- Interviews with the sons and daughters of the applicant.
- The family's safer caring policy.
- Activities 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.8 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

3.3 Understanding attachment and resilience

Attachment theory now plays a significant part in our understanding of children and young people, and how they can be supported. Foster carers need to have an appreciation of attachment issues, and see how these relate to the children they are caring for.

Does the applicant understand that they will often be caring for children who will have had difficult experiences? Can they appreciate that this may make it difficult for these children to build positive relationships? Are they willing to persevere with these children, despite little outward appreciation? Assessors should consider the applicant's ability to 'stick' with a child, helping them build resilience.

5.1a

Potential Evidence:

- Interviews with the applicant.
- Referees, particularly those who have known the applicant for some time.
- Interviews with the sons and daughters of the applicant.
- Activities 4.8 and 4.9 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

3.4 Play and activities

It is important for fostered children to feel part of the family, and one way to achieve this is to involve them in the general activities that the family takes part in. These may be sporting activities, activities involving pets such as horses or leisure pursuits, such as going to stay in a caravan at weekends.

Establishing routines is as important as providing children with lots of activities and the description of a typical family weekend produced as part of the family profile can be used to illustrate both issues. What are the family's routines and can applicants explain the importance of adhering to appropriate routines for young people? What would they do if a child's activities and interests differed from their own?

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5.4a
5.4c
5.8c

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Applicant's written description of a family weekend.
- Observation of family.
- Membership of clubs or organisations related to activities and hobbies.

3.5 Supporting education

The educational underachievement of children in public care is well documented and foster carers can play an important part in promoting the value of education and the educational achievements of the children they care for.

How does the applicant see their role in promoting educational achievement; would they have different aspirations for their own children or are they likely to encourage a fostered young person to continue their education beyond the compulsory leaving age and even support them through university? Do they have any experience in navigating the school admissions procedures or in advocating for additional classroom help or obtaining an educational statement for a child?

Many children and young people in foster care have some form of special educational needs. Would the applicant be able to advocate effectively for these children and ensure they receive the additional support they need? Would they be able to adapt their judgment of 'success' to what is appropriate for each child?

If the applicant has school age children, interviews should be carried out with their teachers in respect of how supportive of their education the applicant is. Reference should be made to these interviews in this section.

5.5a
5.5b
5.5d
5.8d

Potential evidence:

- Interviews with applicant's children's teachers.
- Discussion with applicant.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Applicant's own educational record (if available).
- Activities 2.8 and 2.10 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

4: Develop Yourself

4.1 Understanding the impact of fostering

Some potential foster carers are not willing to acknowledge that fostering a child will bring with it changes and even disruptions to their lifestyle, believing that a fostered child will immediately fit in to and enjoy their warm, close family life. Applicants need to demonstrate that they understand that there will have to be some changes (safer caring practices, for example) and that having another child in the house is bound to have some impact on their own children and relationships.

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How do they intend to deal with the impact on their own children and/or family members?
 How have their children and/or family been involved in the decision to foster? If the applicant is single, include the outcome of discussions about the effect fostering will have on new relationships they may embark on and demonstrate that the applicant is aware of the formal checks a new partner will be subject to.

7.1a
 7.1b
 7.2a

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant.
- Interviews with support network.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- The family's safer caring policy.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.
- Activities 1.8, 2.10 and 3.8 in the *Record and Resource Book*.

4.2 Providing a positive role model

As with any role that involves taking responsibility for children and young people, foster carers will need to recognise the importance of providing a positive role model. This can mean a range of things, from showing respect to other authority figures to leading by example in respect to looking after your health.

When dealing with life's everyday stresses, some people choose to wind down with a cigarette or an alcoholic drink; does the applicant understand that this may no longer be appropriate for them as a foster carer – and what alternative strategies might they employ instead?

Your fostering service will probably have its own policies in this area – does the applicant's lifestyle mean they are unsuitable for certain types of fostering?

2.3c

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant.
- Interviews with personal referees.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.
- Observation of applicant.

4.3 Dealing with stress

The last thing anyone wants is for a placement to break down because the foster carer is finding it difficult to cope. How does the applicant maintain a positive attitude during periods of stress and demonstrate that they will remain committed to a particular child, even when times are difficult?

What sort of situations would the applicant find particularly challenging to deal with because of triggers from the past? Are there indications that they have found new ways of responding which enable them to cope with situations they find challenging? Do they know their own limits regarding what they can and cannot cope with?



Has the applicant had to deal with a particular disability or health issue within the family; how did the family support each other and how has this affected their views on disability? Similarly, how have they dealt with other stresses within the family such as bereavement, divorce or other loss?

If it is a joint application, you will need to consider how the couple's relationship is affected by stress. Can they demonstrate a history of pulling together in tough circumstances?

Supervision and general support from the fostering team are essential to maintain positive placements; how does the applicant demonstrate their willingness to participate in supervision and support group meetings?

7.3c

Potential evidence:

- Discussion with applicant.
- Interviews with personal referees.
- Interviews with sons and daughters of applicant.

4.4 Professional development

In recent times, foster carers appear to be more willing to attend training or to develop their skills in other ways such as e-learning or self-directed study. However, some people who go into fostering are resistant to training and development opportunities.

If the applicant can demonstrate that they have done their own background research into fostering issues this may suggest a positive attitude to ongoing training and development and that they are open to increasing their skills and understanding of fostering. What training do they feel they will need? What are their views on their current skills, attitudes and knowledge?

Has the applicant previously shown a willingness to develop themselves and a commitment to learning, either through formal education or in other ways? How have they approached the pre-approval training? What has been their response to discussions about ongoing learning and development?

7.4a
7.4d

Potential evidence:

- Certificates from courses/training attended by applicant.
- Discussion with applicant.
- Employer's reference.
- Feedback from *The Skills to Foster* training.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: Links

Fostering legislation is devolved across the UK. However, there is a commonality across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the aim of standards and regulations to protect vulnerable children and young people and provide them with the best possible care.

The Skills to Foster Assessment recognises the vital importance of the assessment process in identifying risks, safeguarding children and young people, and ensuring foster carers are well placed to meet their needs. It is our intention that this process goes above and beyond minimum requirements to create an integrated, consistent and efficient process to assess foster carers against their ability to provide safe and suitable care.

In developing the assessment materials, we have referred to legislation across the UK, drawn good practice from our fostering service members and consulted fostering experts.

In addition, *The Skills to Foster Assessment* meets the minimum standards and regulations across the UK, as detailed below.

UK

In 1999, the Fostering Network, on behalf of the UK Joint Working Party on Foster Care, published the *UK National Standards for Foster Care*. Far reaching and child focused, these remain the benchmark for best practice in foster care. It is to these that we have returned to identify the core values at the heart of the assessment.

Standard 13 of the UK National Standards (Assessment and approval of foster carers) requires that '*Each foster carer is subject to and participates in a comprehensive assessment of her or his ability to carry out the fostering task*'. The Standards are as follows:

- 13.1** The authority has a clear, written policy on the assessment and approval of foster carers.
- 13.2** Anyone applying to be considered as a foster carer is assessed on the basis of his or her ability to provide appropriate care for a child or young person looked after in public care.
- 13.3** Each applicant receives clear information on the process of assessment, the criteria against which she or he will be assessed and the appeal procedure should she or he wish to challenge a decision not to approve her or him as a carer.
- 13.4** Information to prospective carers includes a list of the competencies he or she will be expected to demonstrate, the support allowances and rewards available and explanation of the commitment to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory and anti-sectarian practice required.
- 13.5** The assessment and approval process will involve and consider all members of the applicant's household, including any children of their own or those previously fostered or adopted.
- 13.6** All assessments are completed, reports prepared and considered and a decision communicated to the applicant within six months of receipt of their completed application form by the authority.

- 13.7** Each assessment of a prospective foster carer is carried out by an appropriately qualified social worker with experience of foster care and family placement work.
- 13.8** A range of verified employment, health and personal written references are obtained on the suitability of each applicant and appropriate police, government and authority checks carried out.
- 13.9** An assessment report is prepared by the assessing social worker, including a recommendation on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer, appropriate types of placement for his or her abilities and experience, and his or her support and training needs.
- 13.10** Each applicant is encouraged to participate actively in her or his assessment and preparation of the assessment report; she or he receives regular feedback on the progress of her or his approval, at a minimum on a monthly basis, with clear indication of any work the applicant needs to undertake to further the process.
- 13.11** Each applicant has access to a copy of non-confidential sections of her or his assessment report before a decision on approval is made; each applicant has the right to add written comment or information to the report if she or he wishes and to attend the foster panel when her or his application is considered.
- 13.12** The decision on approval is conveyed both verbally and in writing to each applicant, together with reasons for the decision.
- 13.13** On approval of each carer, a written agreement is signed by the carer and the authority, setting out the terms and conditions of the carer's approval, and the role and obligations of both the authority and the carer.

England

In England, the *Every Child Matters* agenda, the revision of the *National Minimum Standards for Foster Care* (2010), the launch of the *Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Care* (2007) and the establishment of the Vetting and Barring scheme, are all steps forward in safeguarding children and improving their lives. They have resulted in more stringent requirements for assessing those wishing to become foster carers.

Assessment in England is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (regulations 27,28 and 29). Schedule 3 sets out the information that should be collected by the fostering service during the assessment process and presented to the fostering panel. This information will be gathered through full completion of the **assessment report form**.

In addition, the *National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services* (2002) set out good practice for fostering services. As per Standard 17, adopting *The Skills to Foster Assessment* process will ensure: 'there is a clearly set out assessment process for carers which defines:

- *the task to be undertaken*
- *the qualities, competencies or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved*
- *the standards to be applied in the assessment*
- *the stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved*
- *the information to be given to applicants*.'

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In addition, the process will also ensure that assessors examine the particular 'qualities, competencies and aptitudes for fostering' identified in NMS 17.11. These are listed below and the relevant *Skills* area given in brackets.

- child rearing (1.1)
- caring for children born to somebody else (1.1)
- contact between fostered children and their families (1.3)
- helping children make sense of their past (3.1; 3.3)
- sexual boundaries and attitudes (2.3; 2.5)
- awareness of issues around child abuse (2.5)
- approaches to discipline (3.2)
- awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults (3.3)
- awareness of own motivation for fostering/own needs to be met through the fostering process ('Motivation'; 1.1; 4.1)
- religion ('attitudes and aptitudes'; 1.7)
- racial/cultural/linguistic issues (1.7; 1.9; 4.2)
- standard of living and lifestyle (2.1; 3.4)
- health (2.3)
- own experience of parenting and being parented ('life experience'; 'attitudes and aptitudes'; 1.1)
- own experiences in relation to disability and/or attitudes to disability ('attitudes and aptitudes'; 1.7; 2.3).

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Updated National Minimum Standards for England are currently being developed and are expected to be launched in late 2010. At the time of publication, the Fostering Network had seen draft materials. We expect *The Skills to Foster Assessment* to be more than sufficient to meet the new Standards. More information will be made available to licence holders on publication of the new standards.

The Skills to Foster Assessment is closely tied to the *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*, and will be a useful tool for social workers and foster carers working together towards the standard. The process is designed to enable both the foster carer and fostering service to readily see the areas of the *TSD Standards* that are covered by the assessment.

The assessed *Skills* are split into four categories:

- 1 Understanding the role of the foster carer.
- 2 Understanding health and safety and healthy care.
- 3 Understanding the development of children and young people.
- 4 Developing yourself.

These areas broadly reflect the seven *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*. Cross-referencing is given on the **assessment report form**, on the **matrix of evidence** in the Assessor's Toolkit and in Appendix 2.

Wales

The Fostering Service Regulations (Wales) 2003 state that as part of the assessment process a report must be submitted to a fostering panel that includes the information specified in Schedule 3, the assessment of the fostering service as to suitability, and recommendations regarding terms of approval. The assessment report form will meet these requirements if completed fully. In addition, the National Minimum Standards (Wales) set out good practice for fostering services with respect to assessment of foster carers.

As per Standard 17, adopting *The Skills to Foster Assessment* process will ensure: *'there is a clearly set out assessment process for carers which defines:*

- *the task to be undertaken*
- *the qualities, competences or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved*
- *the standards to be applied in the assessment*
- *the stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved*
the information to be given to applicants'.

In addition, the process will also ensure that assessors examine the particular *'qualities, competencies and aptitudes for fostering'* identified in NMS 17.11. These are listed below and the relevant *Skills* area given in brackets.

- child rearing (1.1)
- caring for children born to somebody else (1.1)
- contact between fostered children and their families (1.3)
- helping children make sense of their past (3.1; 3.3)
- sexual boundaries and attitudes (2.3; 2.5)
- awareness of issues around child abuse (2.5)
- approaches to discipline (3.2)
- awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults (3.3)
- awareness of own motivation for fostering/own needs to be met through the fostering process ('Motivation'; 1.1; 4.1)
- religion ('attitudes and aptitudes', 1.7)
- racial/cultural/linguistic issues (1.7; 1.9; 4.2)
- standard of living and lifestyle (2.1; 3.4)
- health (2.3)
- own experience of parenting and being parented ('life experience'; 'attitudes and aptitudes'; 1.1)
- own experiences in relation to disability and/or attitudes to disability (attitudes and aptitudes; 1.7; 2.3).

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Scotland

The Skills to Foster Assessment provides tools for fostering services to meet the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009. In particular, completion of the **assessment report form** will provide all the information detailed under Schedule 3 of the regulations as necessary for the fostering panel. The regulations state that the panel must also be provided with 'such other information or observations as they consider appropriate'.

In addition to these Regulations, best practice in Scotland is represented in the *National Care Standards* (2004). These set out what potential foster carers can expect from the assessment process. Standard 5 informs foster carers that they should:

- *Be confident that foster carers are assessed on their ability to promote the health, education and personal and social development of you and any other children and young people in their care.*
- *Know that the agency has clear, published policies and procedures to assess and approve foster carers.*
- *Know that the agency has clearly defined standards for foster carers to follow.*
- *Be confident that the assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker who has experience of child care, foster care and family placement work.*
- *Know that the assessment and approval process involves all members of your household, including children and young people who have been fostered or previously adopted.*
- *Know that the agency provides opportunities for prospective foster carers to improve their understanding of fostering through training and contact with experienced carers.*
- *Know that the agency will make all necessary checks, including criminal records checks, to determine your suitability. These checks are repeated at least every two years.*
- *Be confident that you will be supervised and supported by an appropriately qualified social worker. The supervising social worker will visit in line with legal requirements. This includes at least one unannounced visit each year.*

The Skills to Foster Assessment recognises these requirements and sets out a process which will enable fostering services to meet them.

Northern Ireland

The Skills to Foster Assessment report form enables assessing social workers to gather the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Foster Placement Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 and present this to the fostering panel.

In addition to Standard 13 of the UK National Standards for Foster Care, section 3 of the accompanying Code of Practice published by the DHSS in 1999 sets out the requirements for assessing foster carers. Section 3.7 states '*the assessment process should be designed to gather evidence of the qualities, skills and aptitudes to foster. It should have objective and fair standards which are applied uniformly and are understood by all concerned.*'

The Skills to Foster Assessment enables assessing social workers to meet these requirements and to gather the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996.



Appendix 2: Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

The information in this section is applicable to fostering services in ENGLAND ONLY

The *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care* (hereafter referred to as the *TSD Standards*) were developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and launched in 2007. The standards set out the skills and knowledge that newly approved foster carers need to have to be able to provide the care that fostered children and young people need. They have been designed to support foster carers from their initial training and assessment through their first year of fostering.

The *TSD Standards* recognise the importance of the work foster carers do and are intended to ensure that they have the best possible training, information and support. Every fostering service needs to be able to show that their foster carers have met the standards in their first 12 months as an approved foster carer. *The Skills to Foster Assessment* will allow you to make a significant start in evidencing some of the standards and provide additional information as part of your pre-approval training.

For more information on the *TSD Standards* visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/foster-care

Below are listed all the *TSD Standards*, with cross referencing to the *Skills* areas in which they should be evidenced. This referencing can also be found on the assessment report form and in Chapter 2. The **matrix of evidence** will also be a useful tool to identify links between the *Skills Assessment* and the *TSD Standards*.

Standard 1 Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people	
1. Principles and values	
a. Show your awareness of the principles and values essential for looking after children, young people and their families.	
b. Demonstrate how you promote these principles and values in the care you provide for children and young people.	1.1
2. Equality, inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice	
a. Understand the different types of prejudice and discrimination which can affect children and young people.	
b. Understand why it is important to provide care which respects and preserves each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.	1.7
c. Demonstrate how you support and encourage children and young people to develop skills to deal with discrimination, enhance self-worth and make a positive contribution.	

3. Person-centred approaches	
a. Be able to explain how your care relates to the five outcomes in <i>Every Child Matters</i> .	
b. Give examples of how you take account of the experiences, preferences, wishes and needs of individual children and young people, and their families.	1.1
c. Explain why it is important to listen to children and young people's views about risk and safety, and show how you take these into account in your role as a foster carer.	
4. Confidentiality and sharing information	
a. Understand the importance of confidentiality.	1.4
b. Understand how to apply your fostering service's policies and procedures about confidentiality and information sharing.	
c. Understand the limits of confidentiality (for example, when it is necessary to share information to safeguard a child or young person).	1.4
Standard 2 Understand your role as a Foster Carer	
1. Fostering role	
a. Know the overall aims of your fostering service.	
b. Understand your own role and responsibilities.	All of 1
c. Understand the role of your supervising social worker.	
2. Legislation, policies and procedures	
a. Know about relevant legislation, policies and procedures relating to foster care, and where you can get further information.	
b. Understand the importance of following your agency's policies and procedures.	
3. Relationships with parents and others	
a. Understand the importance of families and friends for children and young people.	1.3
b. Demonstrate how you involve families and others in the lives of children and young people and the important role of foster carers in helping a child maintain contact.	1.3
4. Team working	
a. Understand the concept of 'the foster care team' and your contribution to effective teamwork.	1.5
b. Know who you are accountable to in your work as a foster carer and where to go for support.	

c. Know how to contribute to planning for children and young people, including contributions to meetings and reviews.	1.5
5. Being organised	
a. Demonstrate that you are well-organised, reliable and dependable.	1.6
b. Show that you provide activities and environments that are well-organised and safe.	1.6
6. Complaints and compliments	
a. Understand how complaints and compliments are dealt with in your agency, and know how you can make a complaint.	
b. Know how children and young people can access the complaints and compliments procedure and how you can support them.	
c. Know about the allegations policies and procedures of your fostering service and how to access support and legal advice.	
Standard 3	
Understand health and safety, and healthy care	
1. Legislation, policy and procedures	
a. Show an awareness of the relevant health and safety legislation and guidance and your responsibilities.	2.1
b. Know your agency's procedures in relation to the health and safety of children and young people.	
2. Accommodation	
a. Know how to keep your home safe and free of avoidable hazards that might be a risk to children and young people.	2.1
b. Know the importance of maintaining a good standard of hygiene and cleanliness.	2.1
c. Show that you and those living in your household know what to do in case of fire.	2.2
3. Healthy care and medication	
a. Know what 'healthy care' means for the physical, mental, emotional and sexual health of children and young people.	2.3
b. Have an understanding of children and young people's health and hygiene needs, including allergies and infection control procedures.	2.3 2.3
c. Explain your role in promoting the health of children and young people, including giving advice and information in relation to risk-taking, substance misuse and relationships and sexual health.	2.3; 4.2

SAMPLE

d. Have an understanding of first aid and know how to access emergency medical treatment.	2.4
e. Know what procedures to follow in relation to medication and healthcare procedures, including what consent is required.	
4. Personal safety and security	
a. Understand potential risks to the safety and security of yourself and members of your family and what you can do to reduce or manage the risks.	2.5
b. Know about the range of challenging behaviours presented by children and young people and how to encourage positive behaviour.	3.2
c. Understand the need to manage challenging behaviour in a way that is safe without the use of physical or other inappropriate punishment and give examples from your work as a foster carer.	3.2
5. Risk assessment	
a. Identify examples of risks to children and young people and appropriate action to reduce or manage the risks.	
Standard 4 Know how to communicate effectively	
1. Encourage communication	
a. Demonstrate how you listen to and understand the wishes and feelings of children and young people.	
b. Understand the need to use appropriate means of communication with children and young people including non-verbal and other means, and give examples from your practice.	1.8
c. Demonstrate that you respond appropriately to children and young people in clear, jargon-free language, without being patronising.	1.8
d. Show how you help children and young people to make their own decisions.	
2. Knowing about communication	
a. Describe effective ways of communicating with children and young people.	1.8
b. Understand some of the common difficulties in communicating with children and young people and give examples of how you try to overcome these.	1.8
c. Know how to use different communications media.	1.9

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3. Communication with parents, families and friends	
a. Show that you are aware of the procedures for arranging contact and understand your role as a foster carer.	
b. Understand when and how to raise concerns with parents, families and friends in an appropriate way.	
c. Demonstrate that you understand children and young people's confidentiality when communicating with parents, families and friends, including your own family and friends.	1.4
4. Communication with organisations	
a. Understand the importance of effective communication with other organisations who are in contact with children and young people.	1.5
b. Demonstrate effective communication with your supervising social worker.	
5. Principles of keeping good records	
a. Understand the importance of keeping accurate records.	
b. Know the record keeping policy of your fostering agency, and how information is shared with others, including children and young people and their families.	
c. Know how to record understandable, relevant, clear and concise, factual information, that can be checked.	1.9
d. Know how to enable children and young people to participate in record keeping and keep their own records and memorabilia.	
Standard 5	
Understand the development of children and young people	
1. Attachment and stages of development	
a. Understand the basic principles of how children and young people of all ages form attachments, how these attachments affect their development, and the impact of interrupted development, trauma, separation and loss.	3.3
b. Understand child development and the developmental needs of children and young people.	3.1
c. Understand the difference between chronological age and stages of development and how this may affect a child or young person.	3.1
2. Resilience	
a. Understand how foster carers can help children and young people develop resilience and self-esteem.	

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3. Transitions	
a. Explain significant milestones which mark transition in the lives of children and young people, and the range of responses to them.	
b. Understand how to support individual children and young people through significant life changes and challenges.	
c. Be able to work with young people to develop skills, self-confidence and knowledge to prepare them for adulthood and independent living.	
4. Supporting play, activities and learning	
a. Know how to encourage children and young people to participate in activities.	3.4
b. Explain how play, hobbies and interests are important to social and personal development, and enjoyment of recreational activities.	
c. Explain the importance of adhering to appropriate routines for children and young people.	3.4
5. Supporting educational potential	
a. Show how you can encourage and support children and young people with their education (including early years education) and help them overcome setbacks.	3.5
b. Be able to actively work with families, social workers and teachers to help children and young people achieve.	3.5
c. Know how to support young people in their further education and training, and employment.	
d. Be able to advocate on behalf of children and young people to ensure their educational needs are met.	3.5
6. Understanding contexts	
a. Understand children and young people in the context of their wider family, caring or social network.	
b. Understand the contribution family, caring and social networks make to the development of children and young people.	
c. Understand the impact of abuse, separation and loss on the behaviour of children and young people.	
7. Promote positive sexual health and sexual identity	
a. Understand how to promote good sexual health with children and young people.	2.3
b. Understand how to enable children and young people to develop a positive sexual identity with regard to their own sexuality.	

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8. Supporting disabled children and children with special educational needs	
a. Understand the social model of disability and what it means in relation to your work as a foster carer.	1.7
b. Have a broad understanding of the needs of children and young people who are disabled or have learning difficulties.	
c. Understand the need to adapt activities and experiences so individual children and young people can take part.	3.4
d. Understand how you might support children and young people with special educational needs, and their families.	3.5
Standard 6	
Safeguard children and young people	
1. Legislation, policies and procedures	
a. Know about legislation and national guidance relating to protecting and safeguarding children.	
b. Understand your local multi-agency safeguarding policies and procedures on identifying and protecting children and young people who have been abused or are at risk of abuse.	
2. Keeping children and young people safe	
a. Demonstrate that you understand what children and young people want and need to feel safe.	2.5
b. Be aware of what contributes to a safe environment for children and young people.	2.5
c. Know how to help children and young people keep themselves safe from harm or abuse.	
d. Develop and maintain 'safer caring' guidelines for you and your household.	2.5
3. Recognising and responding to abuse	
a. Understand the different ways in which children and young people can be harmed by adults, other children and young people including the internet.	
b. Understand the different ways in which children and young people can be placed at risk, for example: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, exposure to domestic abuse, neglect, faltering growth, institutional abuse, self-harm.	
c. Understand signs and indicators of possible abuse and neglect.	
d. Understand how children might be bullied and know what action to take if you suspect a child is being bullied.	
e. Understand the procedures you need to follow if you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, and the action you might need to take immediately.	

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4. Working with other agencies	
a. Know about your local safeguarding board and the responsibilities of your fostering service and other agencies in keeping children and young people safe from harm.	
b. Know who the designated child protection worker is at the school, pre-school group, club or other activity.	
c. Be aware of the safeguarding policy of the school, pre-school group, club or other activity.	
6. 'Whistle-blowing' (reporting failures in duty)	
a. Know when and how to refer a concern about child protection, the child or young person's welfare or any other instances of malpractice, negligence or unprofessional behaviour which might not be in the child or young person's best interests or pose a risk to the child or young person.	
b. Know how and to whom to report your concern about unsafe practice of others.	
c. Know what to do if you have followed your own fostering service's policies and procedures on reporting concerns and you are not satisfied with the response.	
d. Identify what to do when you do not get a satisfactory response from other organisations.	
Standard 7 Develop yourself	
1. Your role and approval as a foster carer	
a. Understand the implications of your approval as a foster carer for yourself and your family.	2.5
b. Understand how being a foster carer may affect you personally and where you can get support.	4.1
2. Being aware of the impact of fostering on sons and daughters and extended family	
a. Understand the impact of fostering on your own children and other members of your family, their support and training needs and how to access these.	4.1
3. Using support and supervision to develop your role	
a. Understand the purpose of your personal supervision and annual foster carer review and know how to make the best of these opportunities.	
b. Know what additional support and training is available to you.	
c. Be able to recognise when you need support and the importance of asking for help and advice.	4.3

d. Develop knowledge, skills and understanding relevant to your foster care role, eg treatment foster care, fostering teenagers.	
e. Develop knowledge, skills and understanding to enable you to 'broaden' your foster care role.	
4. Meeting learning needs as part of continuing professional development (CPD)	
a. Understand the need for continuing professional development and the ways in which it can improve your practice.	4.4
b. Understand and be able to reflect on how your day-to-day work as a foster carer is influenced by feedback from people you come into contact with and from children, young people and their families.	
c. Work with your supervising social worker or other relevant person to agree and follow a personal development plan.	
d. Be willing to continually improve your practice and understand how to do this.	4.4
5. Career progression	
a. Understand the career opportunities available to foster carers and know who can help you identify your needs and make the most of these opportunities.	
b. Work with your supervising social worker/provider to access further or higher level training, development and qualifications.	

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Appendix 3: *The Skills to Foster* pre-approval training

Participants in *The Skills to Foster* training course are strongly encouraged to complete a *Record and Resource Book* to accompany their training. This will encourage them to reflect upon what they have learnt, explore issues that arise and build on their learning from the sessions. Each chapter should take two to three hours to work through, following the respective training session.

The activities in each chapter give an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, as well as encouraging reflection. These activities can then provide evidence for the assessment process (as well as for the *TSD Standards* in England).

The suggested activities for each of the *Skills* areas are given below. Not every activity will be relevant for every applicant, particularly if approval is being sought for a specified child or a highly specialised type of foster care.

Of course, it can also not be assumed that completion of the given activity will always result in evidence for the assessment. It may be that relevant points are not covered in the given answer, or that issues are raised by the applicant's responses.

Skills area	Activities that could provide evidence
1. Understanding the role of the foster carer	1.7; 3.8
1.1 Child care experience and skills	1.3; 2.3; 1.7
1.2 Support networks	1.8
1.3 Involving a fostered child's family	1.7; 3.3; 3.5; 3.8; 5.2
1.4 Confidentiality	3.6
1.5 Working as part of a team	1.7; 3.1; 3.2; 3.8
1.6 Organised, reliable, dependable	3.1,
1.7 Promotion of equality and diversity	1.7; 2.5; 2.10
1.8 Communication skills	1.7
1.9 Literacy skills	
2. Understand health, safety and healthy care	
2.1 Providing a suitable environment	5.1; 5.7
2.2 Fire safety	
2.3 Healthy care	1.7; 2.7; 2.6; 2.10
2.4 Medical treatment	
2.5 Safer caring	5.1; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8; 5.10

Skills area	Activities that could provide evidence
3. Understand children and young people	
3.1 Understanding development	4.1, 4.8
3.2 Understanding and managing behaviour	1.7; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.8
3.3 Understanding attachment and resilience	4.6; 4.7; 4.8,
3.4 Play and activities	
3.5 Supporting education	1.7; 2.8; 2.10
4. Develop yourself	
4.1 Understanding the impact of fostering	1.8; 2.10; 3.8; 5.7; 5.9
4.2 Providing a positive role model	
4.3 Dealing with stress	
4.4 Professional development	1.6; 2.9; 3.4; 6.7

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Appendix 4: Further resources

Resources from the Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in foster care. We are committed to raising the standards of foster care in the UK and work with our members to share knowledge and best practice, promote fostering and campaign for positive change.

We provide information, support, advice and resources for foster carers, fostering services, sons and daughters of foster carers and young people in foster care.

A broad range of resources, information, links and resource lists can be accessed via the Foster Care Resource Centre at www.fostering.net. Members of the Fostering Network can download additional resources, including information sheets on key topics, for free.

Members can also call the information line during office hours on **020 7261 1884**.

The Skills to Foster pre-approval training

The Skills to Foster is the leading pre-approval training course for prospective foster carers in the UK. The course focuses on preparing participants for fostering, ensuring that they understand what it will mean for them and their family. Resources include a *Leaders' Guide* for trainers delivering the course, a *Record and Resource Book* for participants and a CD-Rom containing handouts and training materials. For full details and to purchase, visit www.fosteringresources.co.uk

UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999)

Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carers (2005)

Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carers in Scotland

Recruiting the Foster Care Workforce of the Future: a guide for fostering services (2010)

This guide identifies the key elements required to recruit foster carers. It draws on evidence from a recent survey of fostering services, follow-up interviews, and a one-day focus group with representatives from local authorities and independent fostering providers, as well as feedback from an ongoing programme of training events, seminars, workshops and conferences. Available free to members at www.fostering.net

Meeting the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care: learning and development tools from the Fostering Network (2010)

This useful summary maps all of our training and publications to the *TSD Standards*, as well as giving guidance on how all the Standards can be met and evidenced. Available free to members at www.fostering.net

Foster Carer Peer Mentoring (2008)

This good practice guide looks at how you can set up a peer mentoring scheme to enable experienced foster carers to pass on their experience and knowledge, providing support to their less experienced colleagues. Available free to members at www.fostering.net

Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol: England and Wales

Available free to members at www.fostering.net

Other resources

Effective Fostering Panels

Sarah Borthwick and Jenifer Lord, BAAF (2006)

This is a valuable guide for all new and existing panel members and also for all those who come into contact with the work of panels, especially social workers, social work managers, foster carers, and other professionals. It will continue to help panels to review their policies and procedures and to make sound and effective recommendations.

Recruiting, Assessing and Supporting Lesbian and Gay Carers and Adopters

Gerald P. Mallon and Bridget Betts, BAAF (2005)

A Marginalised Resource? Recruiting, assessing and supporting single carers

Bridget Betts, BAAF (2007)

Placing Children with Dog-Ownning Families

BAAF Practice Note 42 (2003)

Assessing Lesbian and Gay Foster Carers and Adopters

BAAF Practice Note 44 (2003)

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What the Standards Say About Fostering

Meral Mehmet, Russell House Publishing (2005)

A book aimed at foster carers but contains useful information relating to checks and health and safety information.

Training, Support and Development Standards (England)

Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things: the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care: a guide for managers, supervising social workers and trainers

Available to download at: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Short Break Carers: supplementary guidance for managers, supervisors and trainers: training, support and development standards for short break carers

Available to download at: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Useful websites

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

www.baaf.org.uk

BAAF is a UK charity focusing on children separated from their birth families. It publishes a range of materials on fostering and produces a UK-wide monthly newsletter called *Be My Parent*, which gives details of children and young people looking for new adoptive or long-term fostering placements. The website provides information on fostering.

Office for Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted came into existence on 1 April 2007. It has taken over the role of inspecting fostering providers from CSCI. Users can sign up for a free electronic newsletter about the work of Ofsted on its website.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW)

new.wales.gov.uk/cssiwsite/cssiw/

CSSIW is part of the Welsh Assembly Government and inspects and registers fostering under the Care Standards Act.

Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care

www.carecommission.com

The Care Commission in Scotland was set up in April 2002 to regulate care services in Scotland.

Criminal Records Bureau

www.crb.org.uk

Disclosure Scotland

www.disclosurescotland.co.uk

Access Northern Ireland

www.accessni.gov.uk

Independent Safeguarding Authority

www.isa-gov.org.uk

