Children’s Wishes & Feelings

Description

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https://sparksfostering.org/wp-content/uploads/speaker/post-6061.mp3?cb=1757183749.mp3

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Children’s welfare and wellbeing are the centre and purpose of the functioning of Sparks Fostering. It’s expected that all reasonable steps are taken to improve outcomes for the children in our care. For the children to succeed while living in the fostering home, and after leaving the fostering home, the children must feel empowered, motivated and heard. Sparks Fostering social workers and foster carers create opportunities for children to express themselves and engage in discussion, planning and decisions about the child’s life.

Foster carers are expected to support and encourage children to attend supervisions and care planning meetings. If a carer doesn’t support a child to engage, the attached ‘Was Not Brought’ guidance (produced by Coventry Safeguarding Partnership) should be reviewed.



Decision making

When encouraging children to participate in decision-making, the following should be considered:

– What does the child or young person want? For the most part, children are capable of making appropriate decisions, especially when the range of options are offered to them; however, all foster carers and staff must regularly talk through the risks and benefits of the choices with the children, so that the children can improve their decision making process. Foster carers and social workers must remain mindful that children in our care are required to become independent before most of their peers, so they must be supported to make good decisions as soon as possible. Older children must be able to make as many decisions as possible for themselves, before they move out to independent living. The child's views as expressed should be discussed, recorded and given due consideration (where possible) before a placement decision is made, at every review meeting and at case conferences. The possibilities and options identified should be explained, discussed and, if necessary, reassessed in light of the child's views.

– What is in the child or young person's best interests? Every child requires support to understand the benefits and potential consequences of the decisions that they make, and when it is possible, the child should be allowed to take appropriate risks. Making choices, taking risks and learning from failures is part of growing up. Like their peers, looked after children need to be supported to learn through experience. When the choices they make are poor or the risks unacceptable, foster carers should be able to talk to the child about their situation and help them to understand and manage their own behaviour differently. Whilst it is normal for foster carers, like parents, to want to avoid unnecessary risks, excessive caution is unhelpful. Children and young people need to be exposed to some risks, proportionate to their age and understanding. They need to be encouraged to make friends, participate in sports and outdoor activities, to be able to stay overnight with friends and explore the world they live in without excessive constraints.

– What are the available options? For younger children, this might be about bedtimes or food choices. For older children the decisions could be about staying out late/overnight and having electronic devices. Children should be supported to make as many decisions about their life as possible by presenting the child with all available options and by helping the child to critically evaluate all of the options.

– **Views of the team around the child.** For significant decisions, the child's social worker will advise how to proceed. The social worker may discuss the issue with the team around the child (including the foster carer). Opinions are recorded on the child's risk assessment. The team around the child should take a view as to how much consultation there should be with the child; even if a child doesn't have direct involvement in certain decisions, all decisions should have the child's best interests in mind.

Choices within the fostering home

Valuing children's wishes and experiences, and supporting them to develop their decision making skills is key to building a good relationship with the children in our care. Children are enabled to build trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers, who know them well, listen to them, spend time with them, protect them and promote their welfare. Children are enabled to develop an appropriate sense of

permanence and belonging and are fully included in their foster carers' family lives.

Children who are new to the fostering home are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. Children are given access to the Sparks Fostering Children's Guide as soon as they are ready to see it (within the first few days of joining the fostering home).

Children are given free access to the household facilities as would be consistent with reasonable arrangements in a family home. Foster carers explain everyday household rules and expectations to children.

Children should be encouraged and supported to exercise choice and independence in clothes, personal items, toiletries etc. Sparks Fostering, working with the responsible authority and where appropriate their family, ensures that every child has sufficient good quality clothing to meet their needs. Cultural, racial, faith based or ethnic expectations about their clothing or diet should be met and supported.

Foster carers are required to give the child access to a range of experiences and opportunities, which help the child to develop physically, emotionally and intellectually.

Foster carers should only request respite care when it is in the child's best interests, including improved stability of the child's placement with the foster carers. It is acknowledged that respite can benefit the child as well as the foster carers, if done appropriately. Any respite care provided should be planned with the supervising social worker and child's social worker and takes full account of the child's needs.

Care planning

Children in our care are often expected to present their views to a panel of professionals. Sparks foster carers (with the support of their supervising social worker) are required to help the child to put forward their views, wishes and feelings as part of each review process, and foster carers and staff ensure that these are fully taken into account by the child's social worker.

Foster carers (with the support of social workers if necessary) should explain the child's plans to them (as far as possible depending on the child's age and level of understanding) and any changes to the plans should also be explained in a way that the child can understand (and contribute to).

Children should feel that they are active participants and engaged in the process when adults are trying to solve problems and make decisions about them.

When plans are being made for the child's future, the child is likely to feel less fearful if they understand what is happening and has been listened to from the beginning. Close involvement will make it more likely that the child feels some ownership of what is happening and it may help them to understand the purpose of services or other support being provided to them, their family and carer. Where a child has difficulty in expressing their wishes and feelings about any decisions being made about them, consideration must be given to securing the support of an advocate.

There are further practical reasons for ascertaining a child's wishes and feelings during the care planning, placement and review process:

- Many children have an understanding of what is causing their problems and what underlies their needs;
- They may have insight into what might or might not work in the context of their current circumstances and environment;
- They often know what sort of support they would most value and be able to access; and
- Engaging children helps to recognise their difficulties, develop their strengths and promote their resilience.

The more mature the child, the more fully the child will be able to enter into discussion about the plans and proposals and participate in the decision-making process. When older children are involved, there may well be a different perception of the child's needs and interests as seen by the child and the child's parents, carers or social worker. With a young child, the social worker should be creative and imaginative in finding ways to communicate and discover their feelings. All children need to be given information and appropriate explanations so that they are in a position to develop their own views and make informed choices.

Children are supported to understand how their views have been taken into account and where significant wishes or concerns are not acted upon, they are helped to understand why.

Children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. Children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress.

communication

All foster carers are expected to have good communication skills and be adept at 'active listening'. Active listening is the process of actively seeking to understand the meaning of another person's communication, whether the communication is spoken or conveyed in a different way. Active listening includes the use of verbal and non-verbal skills (and may also involve use of technological or other aids).

Foster carers are also supported to work with children with physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. Oral and written communications are made available in a format which is appropriate to the physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of the individual. When required, Sparks Fostering social workers support foster carers to make arrangements for reading, translating, Makaton, pictures, tape recording and explaining documents to those people who are unable to understand the document.

Children, including those who communicate non-verbally, are supported to actively participate in decisions about their lives. They are sensitively helped to understand when it may not be possible toact on their wishes and why other action is taken that is in their best interests. Children have access to,and are actively encouraged, to involve an independent advocate and, where appropriate, anindependent visitor.



Independent advocate

Independent advocates don’t work for Sparks Fostering or for social care. They can attend meetings alongside the child, write letters on the child’s behalf or help the child to get all the information that they need and help them to understand what their rights are.

All children should be made aware of their right to independent advocacy and that they can ask their social worker for an independent advocate if they want one.

Independent visitor

An independent visitor is a volunteer who will see the child or young person two to three hours at a time, to do something fun or interesting that the child or young person has chosen. Independent visitors can be particularly valuable for young people who have experienced several moves, or children who would benefit from the company of someone who doesn’t know their full history and isn’t seeing them to ‘work’ with them on the child’s plans.

All children have a right to an independent visitor, and this can be arranged via the child’s social worker.

Identity needs

Children should be encouraged and supported to have positive views of themselves and to be proud of their identity and heritage. Sparks Fostering staff and foster carers treat everyone with dignity and respect and ensure that the children in our care are respected in all areas of their lives. Children experience care that is sensitive and responsive to their identity and family history, including age, disability, faith or belief, sex, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation.

Children are encouraged to explore their identity according to their age and level of understanding, and carers should be mindful that children should have explored these issues before they are expected to live independently. Where foster carers do not have the knowledge or skills to explore these issues, support is offered by Sparks Fostering social workers.

Appropriate arrangements should be made to support children and young people for whom English is not their first language (for example refugees and asylum seekers), carefully taking into account the individual child’s circumstances. Sparks Fostering supports foster carers to respond appropriately using the child’s preferred language.

Appropriate arrangements should also be made for children with disabilities which affect their ability to communicate verbally.

Developing Sparks Fostering

The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. Children’s views are considered at foster carer supervisions (children are seen alone when they are available), at foster carer reviews and when

children ask to be heard. Foster carers should report any children's feedback to the supervising social worker, who will speak with the Registered Manager if appropriate.

Additional Resources (Optional)

Communicating effectively with children and young people: Guidance from the Department for Education

– The acclaimed actor shares his moving story of growing up in care.

Applications to become an independent visitor can be submitted on this page. Requests for independent visitors for children must be made via the child's social worker.

– Supporting care experienced children, young people and adults in vulnerable situations.

– The Children's Commission recorded discussions with care leavers.

– from the NSPCC

– summary produced by the NSPCC.

WORKSHEETS TO USE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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