POLICY FOR
FOSTER CARER RISK ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction

1.1
Risk assessment is part of everyday life for individuals, families, parents and foster carers all over the UK. It is often not called “risk assessment”, but rather is about the decisions that people, especially adults, make for themselves or others so that everyday life can carry on, but that the dangers of harm or hurt are reasonably avoided without impairing the opportunity to live a full life.

1.2
For foster carers, everyday is about them thinking about the children and young people they care for, how to support them living a full childhood and life, but how to do so with some “safety precautions” in place. Foster children often have particular issues and experiences in their individual lives that may make them more vulnerable in certain aspects of life than their peers, and therefore their foster carer needs to consider these particular issues differently when making decisions, than they would about making the same decision for a different child. This could range from deciding about having a “sleep over”, to going on a school holiday trip, to having horseriding lessons, having a mobile phone or using the bus or walking to the corner shop, along with hundreds of other activities and decisions.

1.3
Birth Families and Foster Carers parenting children with disabilities, whether learning disabilities or physical disabilities need to consider how they make decisions about risk, that consider the impact of the child’s disability on their vulnerability in certain situations, but do not impede them having life opportunities.
1.4
Other factors about foster carers making day to day decisions for fostered children are that

- These are other people’s children
- There may be other adults who need to be consulted
- There are plans and agreements already in place for each child
- Foster carers are accountable for their actions and decisions

1.5
Cornerways Fostering Services works to empower and enable children and young people to grow and develop and to experience a happy childhood and prepare for adulthood. To achieve this, children need to have opportunities, learn skills, develop self esteem and confidence. This cannot happen if they do not have the chance to take part in activities, sport, social life, learn to travel and use transport, interact with other people. But alongside giving opportunity, we must make sure children don’t come to harm or be hurt from obvious dangers or threats. To do this foster carers need to make DECISIONS, and to make those decisions they have to THINK THROUGH situations, this is called MAKING A RISK ASSESSMENT.

1.6
This policy should be read in conjunction with the various Cornerways policies that also involve risk assessment activities: as part of foster carer assessments and annual reviews, the safe placement of children, managing of behaviour, missing children, record keeping, health and safety, safeguarding, child protection etc.

1.7
Foster Carers should not be wary about undertaking risk assessments, they can be reassured that they have already been involved in doing so while undertaking their household health and safety check, their safe care plan, their fire plan, being part of their pet or garden play equipment risk assessment, and thinking about what types of placement they and their family are best suited to provide.

2 Risk Assessment and Delegation of Authority

2.1
Cornerways Fostering Services expects that Local Authorities placing children will engage in making clear decisions about delegation of authority, so that foster carers know what decisions they can make about children and those that they need to consult others about. Part of making decisions is about making a risk assessment.

2.2
Cornerways will utilise its own delegation of authority document/tool unless a placing authority has its own documents to use. These will be undertaken at the outset of a placement and reviewed at least at the time of LAC reviews.
2.3 Cornerways Fostering offers training to foster carers about delegated authority and making risk assessments. Other foster carer training of relevance is: Health and Safety, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Social Networking safety, First Aid, Record Keeping.

3 Foster Carers Making Risk Assessments

3.1 The delegated Authority tool will indicate if the foster carer can consider making a decision for the child.

3.2 Foster carers will make simple records of their day to day decisions for children in their daily record and this will include a note of any factors they take into account when making their decision. Foster carers other records are already sources of information about risk, for example medication records, accident (to carer or child) records, physical intervention records.

3.3 Where decisions are new or very different the foster carer may find using the Cornerways Fostering basic risk assessment /decision template useful, which they can keep with their daily record. For example if it is the first time a child is going for a sleep over, or a new sport activity is being considered, or what holiday accommodation would be suitable is being considered.

3.4 Foster Carers will need to consider what information they need to make a risk assessment, this may be information about the particular child, or it may be information of a more general nature, for example about drugs, or self harm or about social networking or about a particular sports club or particular school trip.

3.5 The foster carers supervision record will be an opportunity to also note any risk assessment issues currently being thought about, and any dilemmas discussed.

3.6 Foster Carers have 24 hour a day access to a fostering social worker if they are struggling with making a risk assessment decision for a child and need some help.

5 Helping young people learn about making risk assessments

5.1 Children and Young people need to be able to learn about making decisions about risk for themselves, and this is part of the foster carer task. However for some Looked After Children they need individualised help to understand what is risky for them and why. Taking input and advice from social workers and CAMHS may be essential. Foster carers must be aware that for
some children, their past experiences get in the way of them actually seeing the risk that another similar aged child might see or be able to understand easily. This may particularly relate to how they relate to strangers, how much they trust or mistrust other people, how physically dangerous an activity might seem, dangers of the road and traffic.

5.2
Helping children learn means that foster carers should explain decisions to children, and explain about risk and what would need to be different to make a situation safe.

5.3
As young people get older foster carers should take the time to engage the young person in thinking through situations and risk, and coming to decisions together.

6. Making risk assessments in the moment

6.1 Foster carers may find themselves in situations where they must make an instant decision that is a risk assessment. Getting into the habit of thinking

WHO ……..WHERE ……..WHAT MAIN FACTS MUST I CONSIDER.. WHAT'S THE RISK………..WHATS THE LIKLIHOOD……..CAN ANYTHING REDUCE THE RISK..........DECIDE

will be a useful habit for any foster carer. Being able to explain how they thought through a situation is about them being professionally accountable.

Taking risks isn’t wrong or a negative, if we never took risks we wouldn’t ever let children out of our sight and we would never enable them to be ready to live independently and safely as adults, but what is wrong is not thinking about a decision before making it and ignoring very obvious facts and information.

7. Foster Carers, Risk Assessment, and Children who are missing

7.1 Where children go missing, and their whereabouts are unknown, Carers should follow the procedures for reporting a child missing, to the police and social services and to Cornerways. For some children there will be very specific individual procedures in place which will be followed by carers. For other children the carer will consider the age and history of the child, their vulnerabilities and normal behaviour, before deciding whether to report a child missing immediately or within an amount of time that would allow for them to return from a local shop or other familiar local place (eg if they may just be dawdling home from school).

7.2 Where children go missing it is appropriate that carers err on the side of caution and report children missing if in the carers mind the risk is significant and immediate.
7.3
Carers can always consult with Cornerways if they are unsure of their risk assessment of a situation.

7.4
Cornerways will notify local authorities in writing of any child being missing, this will follow an initial verbal notification.

8. Foster carers, Risk assessments and Parent and child placements

8.1
Foster Carers undertaking parent and baby placements encounter a range of day to day decisions that other foster carers don't and they need to be prepared accordingly, with a clear placement agreement and information about the parent (s) and child(ren). These placements are frequently about risk awareness, risk management and judging when/if to intervene.

8.2
Cornerways Foster Carers for Parent and child placements are specifically registered and training is available for them along with a specific framework for placement agreements, carer supervision and support and carer recording.

8.3
For these foster carers decisions about risk are significantly about the physical safeguarding of infants.

APPENDIX 1 List of some of the risk assessments that foster carers make

APPENDIX 2 basic risk assessment template

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APPENDIX 1
List of just some of the risk assessments that foster carers make for children

- Riding a bike on the road
- Going on cub camp
- Having a mobile phone
- Using public transport to school
- Using public transport in the evening
- Going for a sleep over at friends
- Having a pet
- When to go to A&E with a child
- Having musical instrument lessons
- Going swimming
- Going on a school day trip or overnight trip
- Meeting friends in town
- Going to youth club
- When to report a child missing
- Having friends for a sleep over
- Holiday accommodation (sleeping arrangements, swimming pools and balconies)
- Having an x box with internet connection
- Where to locate a computer
- Going on a sailing activity

And for foster carers of Parent and child placements......

- When to intervene and feed an unfed baby
- When to intervene and change an unchanged baby
- When to sterilize unsterilized baby’s bottles
- When to tell a parent their child’s clothing is completely inappropriate.
- When to consider that a baby shouldn’t sleep that night in the parent’s bedroom
- When to report that a parent and baby have not returned to placement
BASIC TEMPLATE FOR FOSTER CARER RISK ASSESSMENT

Name of child

Activity being considered (eg swimming club /sleep over/holiday)

Who is going to be there?

Where is it happening?

Is there anything in this child’s history or behaviours I should think about or any other knowledge I have? (eg learning disability, vulnerability to strangers, limited sense of danger, )

What am I worried might happen? (eg go off with a stranger, get lost, get bullied, fall off bike, take things)

How likely is the risk to happen?
VERY LIKELY
QUITE LIKELY
NOT THAT LIKELY
Can we do anything reduce the risk? (eg supervision, or doing it slightly differently)

Decision

Date