

Pets in Fostering Households Policy

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About This Document

Title	Pets in Fostering Household Policy
Purpose	Policy and process to be undertaken if foster carers have pets living within the household
Updated by	Rosemarie Cronin, Fostering Panel Advisor
Approved by	Fostering Board
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Version Control

Date Issued	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
September 2015	4.0	This policy has been made relevant to cover pets in the fostering household in general rather than just dogs.	Rosemarie Cronin
September 2015	4.1	Reference to BAAF Good Practice Guide; Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption (2015).	Rosemarie Cronin
September 2015	4.2	Statement to say that Essex Foster carers must not have a dog listed under the Dangerous Dogs Act.	Rosemarie Cronin
July 2018	5.0	Added information regarding carers pets being in the bedroom.	Rosemarie Cronin
July 2018	5.1	Removed the information about dogs leaflet as this is no longer used.	Rosemarie Cronin
May 2022	6.0	Reviewed information and checked links. Document updated for Accessibility	Rosemarie Cronin

Table of Contents

About This Document.....	i
Version Control	ii
Table of Contents	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. Essex Policy.....	1
3. Dogs	2
3.1 Dogs permanently living within the household	2
3.2 Dogs temporarily living in the household.....	3
4. Other Pets	4

1. Introduction

- 1.1** There are many positives to foster carers having pets within their household. Most children and young people can enjoy having pets and can also learn from having to take on the responsibilities for caring for them.
- 1.2** Attitudes to pets and particularly dogs vary considerably, and any assessment needs to be completed, in an objective way, to consider the needs of any children who are or may be placed as well as those of the pet/animal and its owners. For example, dogs can bring several positive aspects to a foster home and this should be recognised alongside any risks or problematic aspects.
- 1.3** It is important that careful consideration is given to the impact of having pets in the household it is also known the combination of dogs and children can be a dangerous one and the fostering service in Essex is committed to ensuring that appropriate risk assessments are undertaken, and the safety of children remains a priority.

2. Essex Policy

- 2.1** It may also be useful if those assessing pets in a fostering household also look at the relevant sections in the BAAF Good Practice Guide; Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption (2015).
- 2.2** Any pets or animals within the fostering household (inside or outside) should be assessed as part of the fostering assessment. If new pets/animals become part of the household after a foster carer has been approved an assessment should be completed by the supervising social worker.
- 2.3** The safety of children and young people is paramount. Assessments on pets/animals should take into account general information available about the species or breed but ultimately needs to be based on the individual animal and its owners.
- 2.4** Issues of risk and safety should be balanced against the potential benefits of owning pets; it is neither desirable nor possible to completely eliminate risk from the life of a child.
- 2.5** There should be careful matching when any child or young person is placed and consideration given to any potential issues e.g. allergies, or known behaviour of the pet or child that may detrimental to either.

- 2.6** If foster carers have pets that are in or allowed in their own bedroom consideration needs to be given to:
- how children may respond if they need to come into the carers bedroom at night, will a pet being in there worry them or prevent them from seeking help when they might need it.
 - how the pet will respond if being disturbed unexpectedly by a child entering the bedroom during the night.
- 2.7** Each situation should be assessed on a case-by-case basis with the assessing or supervising social worker.

3. Dogs

Note: Prospective or current foster carers must not own dogs that are listed and/or registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

3.1 Dogs permanently living within the household

- 3.1.1** An assessment should be completed by the assessing social worker on any potential fostering households where dogs may be living.
- 3.1.2** If there are 3 or more dogs within the household this may be an additional risk due to the possibility of 'pack behaviour'. In these circumstances it is recommended for an independent dog specialist to undertake an assessment. The assessing social worker may also wish to seek advice should from the fostering panel.. Specialist dog assessments can also be requested if there are specific concerns regarding an individual dog.
- 3.1.3** For new approvals the pet/dog assessments (including the independent one if requested) should be included as part of the overall fostering assessment to be presented to the fostering panel.
- 3.1.4** If foster carers are already approved and additional dogs are added to the household an updated dog assessment should be completed. If as a result of the additional dog being brought into the household the number of dogs is over 3, or if there are any concerns regarding the dogs, then again panel advice can be sought, and an independent assessment may be requested.

Dog Safety Code

<h2>Be Alert</h2> <p>Always keep an eye on your children around dogs. Never leave them alone together.</p> 	<h2>Be Aware</h2> <p>Dogs use signals to tell us how they feel. What is your dog telling you?</p> 	<h2>Be Safe</h2> <p>Any dog can bite. Accidents happen fast.</p> 
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Are you dog safe? cfs.org.uk/dog-safety

3.2 Dogs temporarily living in the household

- 3.2.1 If foster carers are planning to look after a dog for a short period of time and it is a dog that they know e.g. a dog belonging to a friend or family member then an assessment should be completed with the supervising social worker.
- 3.2.2 If foster carers look after dogs as another job or through a fostering dog scheme, they must inform their assessing or supervising social worker of this. The following information should be gathered:
- Does the scheme/agency where the dogs are being placed from have an assessment process for dogs and if so, what is involved with this?
 - As part of this assessment is it clear as how dogs are with other people and with children or young people?
 - How many dogs are likely to be coming to live in the household at any one time?
 - How often does this activity take place?
 - Are the dogs who are coming the same dogs, so become known to the carer or are they new dogs being introduced to the household?
- 3.2.3 If assessments are completed on the dogs supervising or assessing social workers should compare the assessment with the fostering pet assessment and consider if there are any areas of information that are outstanding and what further information may be required.
- 3.2.4 Supervising or assessing social workers should discuss with the foster carer about the practicalities of this e.g. how will they introduce the dogs to the children, how are they going to teach a child or young person about safe care around the dogs.
- 3.2.5 For new assessments the above information should be presented to the fostering panel
- 3.2.6 For existing carers, supervising social workers should collate information. If they have any concerns regarding the dogs in the household advice should be sought from the fostering panel or the household reviewing

officer. Depending on the situation a more in-depth dog assessment may be requested or foster carers may be asked to cease looking after dogs where a full assessment cannot be completed.

4. Other Pets

- 4.1 A pet assessment should be completed either during the assessment process or when the animal/pet is planned to be or become part of the household.
- 4.2 Consideration should be given to any feeding arrangements and where and how food is stored. This may be particularly relevant in the case of snakes and reptiles where live prey may be used and this would need to be looked at in line with Animal Welfare Act 2006 and RSPCA guidance.
- 4.3 For some animals consideration needs to be taken of the whereabouts of the cage/tank and how safe it is.
- 4.4 If the assessing social worker is unsure about any risks with animals, they should access current information from reliable sources from the [RSPCA](#) or [Safer Pets](#).