



EDITORIAL GROUP - Peggy Pepperday, Ann Knight, Brian Adams - Foster Parents
 Hilary Owen, Joan Shaw, John Rhodes, Graham Pellew - Social Workers (Substitute Family Care)
 Please send all contributions to Specialist Fostering Unit, 68 Bridgford Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham

CARE AND CONTROL RISK AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Department acknowledges that risks are necessary and that foster parents have to handle this daily. Foster parents and the Department's staff are faced with decisions which may increase or diminish the child's exposure to risk, and personal exposure to criticism. Just as growing up involves new situations and trial and error, so caring for a child involves ever present physical, moral and emotional risks. The test is that of the "reasonable person". When dealing with a child and taking decisions you should do your best to think of the abilities and needs of the child. You weigh up a situation practically, emotionally and morally and know why you decided. There is no winning recipe. Care and control are not separate in bringing up a child. Children can end up at risk from overprotective caring as well as from under-protective caring.

Amongst our hopes and fears in caring for a child is the dread of a betrayal of trust. One of the worst fears is the allegation of abuse.

This fear becomes real for a foster parent in thankfully only a few situations. When it does - again there is no one recipe. The Department has some guidance which is relevant. We say that staff should have the highest respect for the dignity and worth of every person in care and act according to the duty to promote the future welfare of the child. If a child and the trust of care may be or is being abused, this must be stopped. Any person with reason to believe that a child has been abused should bring this to the attention of the Area social worker. Abuse within a domestic household and within the child abuse procedures requires investigation by a social worker and usually by the Police. Increasingly lately, this is done jointly. In the few occasions when this happens within foster care, the child still gets first consideration and this can be particularly distressing for a foster parent.

What does this mean for foster parents?

Firstly - care involves risks. It also means corrective measures which should be aimed at helping the child towards self-discipline and be related to the behaviour. Tasks, restitution, loss of treats and "telling off"



without losing respect are appropriate measures for foster parents to use.

Secondly - do not withdraw clothes or food or all pocket money; do not confine a child to bed all day, or make them wear odd clothes, do not withdraw family access, isolate or frighten a child. A child should not be exposed to or involved in, inappropriate sexual behaviour, nor subjected to physical shaking or other infliction of pain.

Thirdly - do not let these fears put you off providing proper care and contact. Touch is a necessary part of care. It can be appropriate to provide comfort around the internal impulses or rages of the very young or immature child. It may be an important part of encouragement or reassurance, of games and developing skills. There are times when a child needs restraining from damaging others or self and this should occur with a minimum force to control the violence.

Fourthly - remember the child's social worker should be brought into the child's life and informed of major events. Their role requires them to be satisfied and it is in

everybody's interest that they know what caring for this child means. The social worker should regularly see your living and sleeping accommodation and you should encourage the social worker to see the foster child alone.

Maybe we should be saying more about the rare situation when a foster parent is subject to an allegation.

- If there is a support worker, they should not be the investigator, and should be available to talk if the foster parents wish.
- The senior for the child's social worker should decide who will investigate and how. Any request or comment on the process which a foster parent may have, should be put to them.
- Whether or not a foster parent obtains help from a friend or adviser or legal adviser is not interpreted as a sign of innocence or guilt.
- The foster parent is entitled to have the issue looked at as fully or fairly and as speedily as possible. As in other matters any formal complaint may be put to the Area Director.

Regrettably some people who foster or adopt, like others, have been found guilty of offences against children. Life changes and not everything can be foreseen. Some allegations are dismissed as unfair criticisms. However, we need to acknowledge that for some, the complaint, although not a subject of police prosecution, brings to an head a series of misgivings on the part of foster parents or Local Authority. In these cases, hopefully jointly agreed, and with sadness, we part company.

We can get preoccupied or overwhelmed by our fears of risks and of allegations. Probably this is worse because we hear of past degradations and see so much suffering. This article has tried to offer some landmarks. In the Department we have to be realistic and be open-minded - but we do want to give attention to good and open foster care and to share in its achievements.

Rod Jones
 Principal Assistant - Child Care

NCC Response 20180619 Page 2