

Advice Line Q&A

Planning for placing children with relatives – accommodation issues

Question

We have placed a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old who have been in emergency accommodation with their aunt and uncle who are temporarily approved as foster carers. However, the children are currently sharing a bedroom with the carers' 19-year-old daughter (their cousin). The 5-year-old and 7-year-old are sleeping in the same bed while the 19-year-old is sleeping on a blow-up bed on the floor. Is this permitted under the regulations?

Answer

There is no regulation that specifically addresses bedroom sharing in foster care/kinship care. The Fostering National Minimum Standards (Standard 10) states the following:

10.6) In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed."

In terms of kinship care, the English statutory guidance on family and friends care says that these children have the same rights as other looked after children in this regard, but notes the need to balance accommodation issues against other factors, and that children might be more likely to be happy sharing a bedroom with a relative than with a child not known to them.

Many variables come into play when assessing family and friends carers: their existing relationship to the children, the children's wishes, balancing the benefits of a family placement versus placing children outside of a family and friends arrangement; weighing the impact of this against the issue of lack of space/sharing a bedroom. What is the children's experience, are there any particular safeguarding issues? Did they previously live together, share a bedroom? What support, practical and otherwise will the local authority provide?

If the family is in social housing, there may be a commitment to rehousing into larger accommodation. Social housing allocation rules would allow for children of any gender to share a bedroom up to their 11th birthday, or up to age 16 with a child of the same gender. How long is the likely wait for larger homes, does the local policy prioritise these carers? Is it possible to be creative with the available space, to provide sufficient beds (eg. bunk-beds) and privacy? Are the carers assessed as being able to meet the children's needs in other respects, are they resourceful, resilient and in tune with the children's needs? What training might be useful for them too?

In temporarily approving the aunt and uncle as foster carers, the local authority needs to consider whether, as per Care Planning Reg 24/Schedule 4, they can ensure 'that the accommodation and home environment is suitable with regard to the age and developmental stage of [the child]'.

The Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, states:

In approving the foster carer the fostering service will need to be satisfied that there is adequate space to a suitable standard, as set out in Standard 10.6 of the NMS, or if this is not the case set out proposals as to how it will be met in the future. The wishes and feelings of the child will be an important factor in helping the social worker to assess the suitability of the accommodation.

If a fostering panel considers that the accommodation arrangements are not entirely suitable, they are likely to want to know what support the local authority will provide and the proposals to remedy this in future.