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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since one in four families in the UK owns a dog, and nearly half of all families have a pet (PFMA, 2014), it is no surprise that questions about dogs and pets in fostering and adoption are commonplace, and this Good Practice Guide aims to provide advice for social workers, foster carers, adopters, and panel members. The main focus is on dogs, and the guide includes information about the advantages and challenges of owning dogs when fostering or adopting, matters for consideration in assessment, and advice about managing issues that might arise during placement. The guide also looks at the relevance of other pets in fostering and adoption, and provides both general principles and specific information that may be helpful.

Attitudes to dogs and pets vary considerably. For some people, dogs are “man’s best friend”; significant family members bringing loyalty and friendship that have huge benefits for the health and well-being of people. It is also generally recognised that dogs can perform useful tasks for humans in traditional working roles, and increasingly in a range of therapeutic contexts. For others, however, dogs are potentially dangerous animals primarily associated with injury and disease; noisy nuisances responsible for fouling public spaces and intimidating people. Attitudes to other animals, particularly pets like rodents and reptiles, can also invoke strong feelings, both positive and negative.

People’s attitudes will be influenced by various factors, including culture, belief system, and previous individual experience, and the issues arising from this can be played out in fostering and adoption contexts where dogs and other pets are involved. It is important to be mindful of this so that judgements do not unfairly characterise people as oversentimental with a “substitute child”, or alternatively as hard-hearted individuals whose attitudes are incompatible with providing sensitive empathic care to children. It is also important to recognise and respect minority perspectives in relation to living with dogs or other pets.

Some politicians and high profile figures have publicly mocked social workers for an excessive interest in and caution around the issue of pets and dogs in adoption, for example, with references to a ‘bloated’ assessment process characterised by a ‘six page dog assessment’ (Gove, 2011). However, news stories report dogs biting children, often in family homes, and children have been bitten by adopters’ and foster

carers' dogs. Other children have experienced placement disruptions because of issues relating to animals in the home, and they might feel that a thorough consideration of this aspect of the family is time well spent. The contributions from adopters, foster carers and social workers throughout this practice guide should serve to illustrate this point.

This practice guide has been developed alongside an assessment form for dogs (Appendix A) and an assessment form for other pets (Appendix B). Completed examples of these forms are included in this book as Appendices C and D. Sample forms are also available in the members' section of the CoramBAAF website (www.corambaaf.org.uk). The forms are provided free to all licence holders of CoramBAAF's fostering and adoption assessment forms.

This guide is also intended to be helpful in assisting fostering services and adoption agencies to develop carefully considered, logical and proportionate policies in relation to dogs and other pets. Although the guide is written specifically in relation to fostering and adoption, it will apply equally to other legal arrangements such as special guardianship.

Chapter 3

Advantages and disadvantages of keeping dogs as pets

THE ADVANTAGES OF DOGS

Emotional well-being

Dogs provide a real source of companionship and unconditional affection for both adults and children. Many children joining new families may be anxious or afraid to make overtures to the humans in the household, and the dog might be able to provide a more available listening ear (see Rockett, 2014). Where children's rejecting behaviour can drive humans to respond with hurt and anger, dogs are less likely to get caught up in these relatively subtle dynamics. A literature review of scientific and academic publications (Dogs Trust, 2011) provides clear evidence to show that dog ownership is inversely related to loneliness, isolation and depression in humans.

Although not specific to fostering and adoption, there are a number of studies that highlight the therapeutic benefits of dogs in different settings. Some identify the benefits that dogs bring for autistic children (Burgoyne *et al*, 2014), and in greater socialisation for disabled children. In certain contexts, such as during hospital examinations, the mere presence of a dog has been found to reduce levels of stress and anxiety in children (Dogs Trust, 2011), and one study that looked at group therapy for children who had been sexually abused (Dietz *et al*, 2012, p 665) concluded that 'children in the groups that included therapy dogs showed significant decreases in trauma symptoms including anxiety, depression, anger, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, and sexual concerns'.

Fostered children in Rockett's (2014) study reported that animals (mainly dogs) in the foster home made them feel calmer and less stressed. There is also evidence to suggest that, for people who are not experiencing particular stresses, there are still 'many positive psychological and physical benefits for [pet] owners' (McConnell *et al*, 2011, p 1239).

Barbara (foster carer)

We have had a dog all the time we have been fostering, and over the years I have noticed how children can often talk through the dog to me, and seen how they have all enjoyed loving and walking the dog. Our current placement is a disabled child with complex health needs, and his life was very fragile. We were told that he was possibly blind, but I noticed that he could see the dog. I believe the child has learnt to move because he wants to get to the dog; now he rolls all over the floor after the dog, even though the child has neurological brain damage, and by all accounts should not be able to move like this. He can even sign “dog”.

Gilligan (2009, p 70) spells out the emotional benefits of animals more generally and in relation to children in care:

An animal may be warm, cuddly, responsive, loyal, non-judgemental, sensitive, reliable and constant. It can contain the secrets and stresses confided within it. This “listening ear” which an animal may provide may be very therapeutic for a child who finds it hard to access what he or she regards as a trustworthy human ear ... The animal can represent a comforting, precious and supportive constancy. It may signal very clearly its affection for the child, a child who may have been starved of such affection at many points in the past. The purring of a cat, the nuzzling by a horse, the wagging tail of a dog directed in recognition of a child familiar to the animal may prove healing gifts for the child craving acceptance and affection. This sense of “lovability” conveyed to the child by the animal may help to improve self-esteem.

Attachment

Rockett (2014) and Rockett and Carr (2014) go further than this, and evidence how dogs serve the function of attachment figures in line with the understanding of attachment theory and the secure base model. Rockett offers specific examples from a study of the lived experience of children in long-term foster care to show how this applies in relation to providing a safe haven, a secure base from which to explore the world, and in relation to separation distress and proximity maintenance. It is noted from the wider literature that humans are more likely to form attachment relationships with animals when they have fewer social networks, and this will often apply to children in foster care or adoption.

In addition to a pet serving as an attachment figure, Rockett (2014, p 230) suggests that ‘an animal’s presence within the foster environment may facilitate human–human relationships from an attachment perspective’. This happens in two ways. The first is through “softening” – how the

animal influences the child's perception of the foster home. This can include the dog serving as a "transitional object" for the child, offering an opportunity for safe, shared experiences with the carer, and through recognising that if the carer is kind and loving to the dog, then they may well demonstrate the same approach to the child. The second aspect is "switching", which relates to how the child originally develops trust in the animal, and later, having recognised the trust between animal and carer, develops that trust and attachment directly.

Fostered children speaking

I like spending time with Socks and I used to hide in [the living room] with him when there was a knock at the door. I used to worry it was the social worker coming to take me away. I didn't feel safe without Socks and when I was with him, holding his ears, I felt relaxed and I wouldn't have the big thumping in my body.

I heard Rose talking to Socks about things about me. I heard her telling him to be nice to me and not to feel jealous because she still loved him. She said that I seemed really nice and that she wanted to get to know me. I sat on the stairs and listened and watched her through the rails. It made me feel funny in my tummy when she said those nice things, and when I saw that she was talking to Socks I liked it so I started talking to him too.

[Rockett, 2014]

Fostered children speaking

I find it easier to talk about difficult stuff with Gilly or Rich when Scruff is around. He doesn't really do anything special, but just knowing he is there makes it easier to do things that are tough.

When bad stuff happens, or I have a really bad day, Scruff's very slow and quiet. He looks at me different, like he knows something is up, but he doesn't quite know what. But he's always trying ... he's there the whole time. And he, like, seems to act the same way I feel – like he knows what I'm really feeling. Weird in a way 'cos it's like he can read my thoughts. Sometimes ... when things are really bad, I like being with him because I like having a cuddle and he never seems to really get stressed. I like that. He seems calm the whole time, and always there.

Sometimes I don't get stuff from Gilly or Rich when I need it, and that's when Scruff is around for me. And that's when I like it. I don't have to feel bad about saying things to him. He doesn't tell people – because he can't!

[Rockett, 2014]

Health and physical well-being

A summary and review of research (Dogs Trust, 2011) also correlates dog ownership with good physical health in terms of both adults and children having increased exercise, and reduced likelihood of being overweight or obese, although this only applies where dog owners actually walk their dogs. In some studies, dog ownership has been linked with reduced diabetes risk and reduced blood pressure. While this might link with the increased exercise, in some experiments it is the physical touch – stroking the dog – that is associated with beneficial outcomes. A number of studies have also suggested that, where children were brought up in dog-owning families, they had a reduced risk of developing allergies, asthma and eczema (Dogs Trust, 2011).

Resilience and leisure interest

Dogs can provide a great source of fun and interest, and children can derive great satisfaction from attending dog clubs and dog shows, participating in dog training or obedience and agility competitions, or from simply teaching their dog to “do tricks” in the garden. Even just walking the dog allows the child to experience the pleasures of the outdoors, to have space for reflection and talking, and to meet with other dog-walkers. It can also provide a focus for conversation that gives children something in common with peers, or can offer a well-rehearsed “script” that can be used in conversations with new adults, allowing for the practice and development of social skills. In some situations, early experiences with dogs in the home can be the start of an interest that leads to employment or a career in later life.

Where children are offered an opportunity to share in the care and responsibility for the dog, this will likely assist in their sense of achieving competence, being trusted with something important, and experiencing a sense of what it feels like to take care of another living being. Through the dog, children can learn about meeting the needs of others, using power appropriately, and protecting the vulnerable with care and consideration. This can help with their self-image and can play an important part in developing resilience (see Gilligan, 2009).

Sense of family membership

Dogs are often seen as full and integrated members of the family, and it can be helpful for fostered or adopted children to find a position within the family that involves relationships with both human and canine members. Where they have a responsibility for sharing in the dog’s care or routines, this can help to cement a sense of their place in the family. More generally, the dog can provide a focus for shared family events: going for a walk together, visiting the vet, or simply playing in the garden. Where dogs have been acquired from rescue centres,

this can sometimes provide a unique and safe opportunity for children to think about and discuss their own experiences of being ill-treated or neglected in their birth families, and to help them understand that others can provide appropriate safe care. Rockett (2014) links this to the development of attachment, and provides evidence to show that foster children would often draw parallels between their own experiences and that of dogs in the family.

Katy (adopter)

I am a single adopter and at the time of adoption I had a medium-sized mongrel dog called Toby who had come from a rescue charity about 12 years previously. Right from the beginning, Kimmy claimed Toby as “her” dog and there was an immediate bond. Kimmy enjoyed looking after Toby; she loved feeding him, making sure he had enough water, and this was really positive and facilitated conversations about how to look after animals (and children) and keep them fed and safe. Kimmy had many problems at the beginning and her life wasn’t easy, but she found great comfort in our dog. Toby looked after Kimmy, followed her around, and there were many occasions when the thing that snapped her out of a full-blown tantrum was the dog. The first thing in coming out of a tantrum, she would lay on the floor cuddling him.

Kimmy came to know that I “adopted” Toby from a charity and that just like her he came from a difficult background where his first family did not look after him and hurt him. She really identified with this, and over the years I often found her talking to the dog about her feelings and emotions in a way that she found difficult to do with anyone else. I have gained a lot of insight into Kimmy’s behaviours and emotions by sitting at the bottom of the stairs listening to her talk to the dog.

As Toby became older, I knew he was in pain. Telling Kimmy that we would need to have Toby “put down” was very difficult and she was distraught. I had always anticipated that this would be really difficult for Kimmy and it was. I prepared for the event quite carefully, and we made time for family photographs with Toby and had a “special day” for him when he was allowed to have any food he wanted and go to his favourite place. On the day that he was to be put to sleep, Kimmy got to say goodbye to Toby at home.

It was really difficult because I was also devastated, and it was vary hard to support both my own emotions as well as hers, but in hindsight I think this was positive in many ways because we were able to work through these really strong emotions together. Seeing me express strong emotions of sadness almost gave Kimmy

“permission” to express the way she felt. Kimmy dealt with her emotions over Toby’s death by looking out every photograph of him that she could find. Every night for a long time she talked about Toby before going to sleep; not easy for me, but I thought it was really positive that Kimmy found ways of dealing with the loss that worked for her.

A while later we decided to get a new puppy and this has also been a fantastic learning experience for Kimmy. She has been centrally involved in this – she was part of choosing and naming the new puppy and is involved in all aspects of her care. I have photographs of Kimmy at the vet with the new pup, wearing a stethoscope and listening to her heartbeat. She spent months looking up YouTube dog-training videos and has been responsible for teaching Molly many fun tricks as well as being part of the more serious training. Kimmy has difficulty with concentration and application to learning in school, but when the subject of learning is dog- or animal-related, she finds motivation. She is a fount of knowledge about looking after and training dogs. Having family dogs in her life has taught Kimmy about way more than having a dog.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF DOGS

Safety issues

Children do get bitten by dogs and this risk should never be minimised. There have been occurrences where children have been seriously injured or even killed by dogs, although death is very rare. Data from the NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre (2012) showed that, in 2011–12, there were nearly 6,500 hospital admissions in England as the result of injuries sustained from dog bites, with children under the age of 10 accounting for around one in every six of these admissions. Data on the types of injuries sustained showed that children had a higher rate of admission for oral and facial surgery than adults.

This means that there were just over 1,000 dog-inflicted injuries to children under the age of 10, which compares with 35,000 incidents of children under four falling down the stairs, and 50,000 children under 14 being admitted to Accident and Emergency because of burns or scalds (Child Alert, 2014). This should help to put the risk into proportion, but whatever the statistics say, for each child who is bitten by a dog, this will be a significant incident, with potential physical and psychological consequences. Adopters and foster carers need to be mindful of the risks, and take appropriate measures to manage and reduce them, as suggested elsewhere in this guide.

With larger dogs, there is also the risk of injuries from dogs jumping up or inadvertently knocking over a child. These are real risks that need to be considered carefully in the dog assessment and also at the time of matching, but in a way that is proportionate and considers both the likelihood of this happening, and the probable consequences if it does. It is normal for children to get bumps and bruises in the course of their childhood, and in most cases this does no lasting harm.

Kerry Taylor (Blue Cross Education Officer)

Most dog owners have lovely family dogs that they consider wouldn't hurt a fly. But for all dogs there are times when they can react in an unwanted way, for example, around food, when woken, in pain or stressed. There are many benefits to having a dog in the family, but it is important to know how to all live safely and happily together. Understanding your dog's body language and teaching your child how to behave around dogs are so important for both your child's safety and your dog's well-being.

(Blue Cross, 'Pet charity reveals how to help protect children around dogs', Press Release, 28 July 2014)

Mary (social worker)

Not all dogs are compatible with fostering or adoption, and not all dog owners are suitable to foster or adopt. I recall turning down a family that kept large German Shepherds as guard dogs, penned in their kitchen, barking incessantly and aggressively. The couple found it difficult to appreciate that both dogs and children can be unpredictable and even I was perturbed by the dogs' behaviour. Another family had three medium-sized terrier dogs in a small, two-bedroomed terraced house. With the dogs continuously yapping and snapping at my ankles, it was clear that space was an issue. The couple were advised to consider reducing the number of dogs but decided to prioritise their animals above their desire to adopt.

One couple with two large rescue dogs were very co-operative when I suggested that their animals might benefit from training. One dog in particular was very anxious and continuously alert for strangers walking by, or coming into the home. I assessed that there was a potential risk of the dogs becoming jealous of a child joining the family, but fortunately the couple sought help from a respected dog trainer. She taught the couple how to help the dogs to modify their behaviour around adults and children. Two young boys were

subsequently placed separately in this family; both developed positive relationships with the dogs, and loved going on walks with them and their adoptive parents.

Another couple had an Old English Sheepdog. Although the assessment gave no indication of any problems, as always I mentioned that dogs can sometimes be unpredictable in their behaviour. When the couple were matched with a two-and-a-half-year-old child, we planned the introductions and the couple decided it was best if the dog was introduced to their child in a local park where it would be less inclined to be territorial. On the day in question, the child enjoyed running around in the park with the dog, until the dog jumped up and bit her just below the eye. This came as a great surprise to the adopters who took the difficult decision to immediately rehome the dog with another family member.

Robbie (social worker)

One of the families I assessed had two Staffordshire bull terriers that seemed lovely dogs. Although they barked every time I arrived for a visit, the adopters kept them in the kitchen for a while until they calmed down and that seemed to work. I saw them with children and adults during the assessment and I never saw any concerning behaviours. Also, the adopters had involved a dog psychologist who provided a report reassuring me that the dogs had lovely temperaments and did not represent a risk. We placed an 18-month-old girl with them, and the adopters proved to be fabulous parents to her.

However, a few months after the adoption order, I had to visit the family to discuss something new. When I arrived, the dogs (who were kept in the kitchen behind a stair gate) started barking, fighting each other, and being aggressive, until one of them bit the other quite badly. The male adopter went in the kitchen to separate the dogs, and one of the dogs bit his hand and broke it.

The adopters were horrified and very shaken by what had happened. They explained that, since their little girl had moved in with them, one of the dogs seemed to fight the other each time anyone arrived at the house, but this time it had gone too far. I did not even need to ask what they were going to do about it; they immediately made the decision that the aggressive dog could no longer live in the family home. But what could have happened had the two-year-old child got in between the dogs at the wrong time ...

Health risks

Dogs can carry certain zoonotic diseases (animal diseases that can be communicated to humans). It is recognised that 'younger children are at highest risk of catching these diseases due to weaker immune systems and their investigative behaviour' (Westgarth, 2010, p 10). This will also be the case for children with certain health conditions, or where behaviour is more typical of a younger child.

One specific infection is toxocariasis (NHS, 2013b), which is caused by roundworm parasites most commonly found in cats, dogs and foxes and which spreads from animals to humans via infected faeces. Puppies and kittens are more likely to be infected by toxocara than mature dogs and cats. Toxocariasis is very rare in the UK, with the Health Protection Agency suggesting an average of three reported cases each year for the decade 2000–2010 (NHS, 2013b). In most cases, people have mild symptoms such as coughs, a high temperature and headaches, but in rare cases the infection can cause severe symptoms, such as fatigue, loss of appetite, breathing difficulties, and blurred or cloudy vision. Most cases make a full recovery and do not experience any long-term complications, but there is a risk of permanent vision loss if one of the eyes is affected.

The NHS (2012) offers general pet hygiene tips to reduce the risk of infection.

- Wash your hands thoroughly. Always use an antibacterial soap after handling your pets (this is essential before preparing food).
- Teach children to always wash their hands. You could wipe their hands with a cleaning wipe, especially before they eat anything.
- Make sure children stay away from dog and cat faeces. Don't let children play around a litter tray and stay clear of dog litter bins at the park.

In relation to toxocariasis (NHS, 2013c), it is suggested that children should also wash their hands with soap and water after coming into contact with soil or sand, and should be taught about the dangers of eating these. Pets should be kept away from children's sandpits, and these should be covered when not in use. They additionally note that owners should check that their dogs (and cats) are kept clean, regularly dewormed and that faeces are properly disposed of. The NHS (2012) advises that animals should not be allowed to sleep on or in people's beds, and since dogs use their tongues for cleaning themselves, they could pass on germs by licking humans, especially around the mouth.

Cohen (2012) makes similar points about hygiene in relation to a range of pet animals, including dogs, but attempts to put the concerns into context:

While there may seem to be a frightening list of potentially dangerous pet diseases, remember that as long as you keep your pet regularly wormed and treated for external parasites, such as ticks and fleas – and

as long as you take common sense precautions like always washing your hands thoroughly after handling animals (and before handling food!) – then the incidence of infection from pets is relatively rare. And even once infected, in many cases, the illness can be easily treated or will resolve by itself, often with no outward symptoms! It is only in rare cases that the disease will develop severe complications.

The fact is that most reasonable parents will permit children to touch animals at petting farms and the like, and they will likely do so on school trips and other outings. They will also be allowed to undertake gardening and outside play involving contact with soil and sand. For most people this is accepted as low risk, and one which is outweighed by the associated benefits. As a general rule, risk needs to be managed, not avoided, and statutory guidance in fostering reminds us that while foster carers should 'avoid unnecessary risks, excessive caution is unhelpful' (Department for Education, 2011, p 24).

Allergies and phobias

Some children are allergic to dogs (NHS, 2012), and in such cases even the most rigorous cleaning regime may not prevent allergic reactions, although it should be noted that some dogs constitute a lesser allergy risk than others (see Dogs Trust, undated b). In other situations, a child might be so afraid of dogs that living with a dog would be impossible. Both of these potential difficulties can be addressed by good matching processes, but it is essential that this is actively considered by both the placing authority and the foster carers or adopters themselves.

For foster carers in particular, they will also need to be sensitive to the fact that some of the professionals involved in a child's case might be allergic to their dog or other pet, or phobic about them, and so the carer must be willing to try and make adjustments around this as necessary. Sometimes this might be as simple as putting a dog into another room for the duration of a visit, but if things are more complicated, this might require flexibility and sensitivity from all parties.

Rachel and Caroline (adopters)

Just over a year ago, our two sons were placed with us, aged two and three years old respectively. They came from a background of severe neglect, domestic abuse and parental drug use, and their birth parents' home was often visited by drug dealers with their large dogs, demanding money. As a result, both boys came to us with an almost debilitating fear of animals. The eldest would literally freeze in fear then have a complete meltdown if he even saw a dog in his line of vision, regardless of how near or far that dog was. The youngest, seeing the absolute fear of animals in his older brother, seemed to have acquired a very similar response.

We have two cats which, unbeknown to anyone at the time of matching, induced the same response in the boys, and the first few weeks were really difficult. However, slowly but surely we worked with the boys to try and reduce the fear by taking little steps. With a lot of hand-holding and physically and emotionally containing the boys, we slowly enabled them to stand in the same room as the cats, then closer to them, then with the boys in our arms we stroked the cats until, remarkably, one day, the youngest reached out his hand and stroked our tortoiseshell himself. He was so proud and really enjoyed the softness. It took a few more weeks for our eldest to do the same but he did, and again he was so proud.

We also began to notice that, as we walked through parks, dogs would walk past us and neither boy seemed to mind. Then one incredible day, we were on a beach next to a man and a small dog. One of the boys stopped to look and the man asked them if they'd like to stroke his dog. We were about to explain that they were afraid, when both boys nodded, grasped our hands and stepped forward. They stroked a dog. They actually stroked a dog! We couldn't believe it and even now, writing this, the lump returns to my throat.

Now, a year later, both boys adore our cats, actively seeking them out, and, in fact, they seem to be a source of calmness and even therapy for our eldest. He recently announced he wanted a dog for his birthday next year!

Cultural considerations

There will be some children from particular religious or cultural groups where placement with a dog-owning family will not be appropriate. Maybe the most common example relates to Islam. In a book written specifically for foster carers of Muslim children (Khanom, 2012, p 31), it is suggested that:

There is no prohibition on Muslims keeping pets, with the exception of dogs and pigs. Guide dogs, guard dogs and hunting dogs are acceptable however for the specific purpose that they are needed ... Please note, however, that dogs are not to be allowed to enter a place of prayer, whether that is in the young person's bedroom or in the mosque ... Many Muslim children are afraid of dogs due to lack of exposure to them.

It is important, however, not to make assumptions since not all Muslims will accept this interpretation of their religion, and some Muslim families do keep dogs as pets. It will therefore be important to listen to individual children and their families' wishes and feelings regarding this matter. Children from other minority groups may also have been brought up with, and hold particular attitudes to, dogs, that need to be carefully considered.

The risk to the dog

In some situations, children may pose a serious risk to dogs and according to the NSPCC (undated), 'animal abuse by children is quite widespread' in the UK. This aggression might be the result of their own experience of violence and abuse, or because they are impulsive or thoughtless, or simply unable to interact calmly and appropriately with the dog. If a child teases or hurts a dog, then retaliation might be the normal response, with potentially dire consequences for both the child and dog. Any information on a child's previous behaviour with animals must be considered carefully as part of the matching process.

Penny (foster carer)

As an experienced foster carer for over 25 years, I have found, sadly, that a number of children and young people will take advantage of pets' good natures if they are allowed to. I have two personal experiences of this.

The first was where an 11-year-old girl came to us in an emergency because her mother had been detained for certain offences and had not anticipated or planned for this. The girl brought with her an eight-month-old black mongrel dog. Within two days this unhappy little girl had started to take her anger out on the little dog. She was taking it for a walk to the end of the garden when I observed her from the kitchen window holding it by the throat and shaking it. I went straight out and told her gently that this was not how we treated our pets; suffice to say she was not allowed unsupervised time with the dog, and it was moved to another member of her family.

The second example was when I cared for a teenager who wanted a goldfish. Despite voicing my concern to the social worker about this plan, citing the young person's inability to care for herself, low self-esteem, and self-harming behaviour, I was overruled. Consequently the teenager squeezed the goldfish to death in a fit of anger, which was very unpleasant.

I would like to say to any carers who believe their pets are safe from children placed with them to be very aware of the potential mistreatment of their beloved furry family member. Children, especially those who have experienced domestic abuse, will often have experienced pets being treated cruelly. However, we do and always have had a dog, and now also have six chickens, and when children are well supervised it can be a very productive way for them to learn to care.