

Chapter 5

Supporting foster carers to understand their role

This chapter focuses on foster carers' induction to fostering, looks at how the working relationship between supervising social worker and foster carer is developed, and also considers how other support mechanisms can be established for the foster carer and their family members.

Once a carer has been approved by a fostering service, their fostering experience begins. It is the service's responsibility to ensure that the carer receives a comprehensive introduction to the legal requirements of fostering and to the service's own policies and procedures. The supervising social worker will play a key role in this, and some of the main tasks that they are responsible for performing during this initial fostering period are described below.

PROVIDING INDUCTIONS

Section 20.1 of the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards (2011) states that all new foster carers must receive an induction. The exact content of this varies from service to service, but can include the points below:

- an introduction to their supervising social worker, if this is not their assessing social worker;
- an introduction to the service's key staff members;
- the provision of the service's fostering handbook and an opportunity to discuss its content;
- the provision of a Foster Care Agreement, which must be signed by all parties;
- the development of a safer care policy for the household;
- the provision of an identity badge;
- linking the foster carer with a mentor;

- the provision of the service's training brochure and the development of an individual training plan;
- introductions to peer support groups and fostering associations;
- an explanation of the process for expenses claims;
- the provision of the Training, Support and Development standards workbook, if this has not been provided during the assessment stage;
- ensuring that the foster carer has a lockable storage facility for confidential documentation;
- ensuring that the foster carer is familiar with the correct process for recording and submitting recordings about the child or young person placed with them;
- ensuring that the foster carer understands the need to record and report safeguarding concerns (this is discussed further in Chapter 10);
- the provision of information about statutory processes relating to foster homes;
- the opportunity for the foster carer to shadow experienced foster carers.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

In one independent fostering service, which has a team of parent and child foster carers, carers are not able to take a first placement until they have shadowed an experienced foster carer and provided three days of respite foster care.

(Pathway Care, Ashburton, Devon)

In some services, the assessing social worker becomes the foster carer's supervising social worker after the fostering panel has taken place. This can be advantageous because they know the foster carer well, have established a working relationship with them, and are aware of the family's unique characteristics. They are, therefore, well placed to discuss a possible match with a child, based on their detailed knowledge of the fostering family.

In other services, the foster carer transfers from an assessing social worker to a supervising social worker immediately after approval. In such cases, the carer needs to be introduced to their supervising social worker as soon as possible after the fostering decision-maker has approved them. Some services make plans for the supervising social worker to be present at the approval panel meeting or to meet the foster carer when it has concluded. This means that the foster carer knows which social worker will be supporting them from the outset. However, this could be seen as pre-empting the outcome of the decision-maker's

deliberations. The fostering panel only makes a recommendation to the decision-maker, and the final decision on the carer's approval needs to be made within seven working days of the decision-maker receiving the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. While it is rare for a decision-maker to disagree with a panel's recommendation, it can happen. Therefore, introducing a supervising social worker prior to this point may raise the prospective carer's expectations that approval will be granted, potentially leading to additional disappointment and confusion for them if they are not approved.

Given that foster carers form working relationships with their assessing social workers, this partnership needs to be transferred to the supervising social worker (if this will involve a different worker). If possible, the supervising social worker's first visit to the foster carer should be carried out with the assessing social worker also present. The foster carer's strengths and vulnerabilities, as identified by the assessing social worker, should be discussed during this meeting, so that the supervising social worker can continue to support the carer in these areas.

The supervising social worker should read the foster carer's assessment report and the minutes from the fostering panel prior to their initial visit, so that they are aware of any issues raised by the panel and any actions required, for example, the worker may need to source a specific training course for the carer. During the initial visit, the supervising social worker should clarify whether the carer has received full details of the fostering service's policies and procedures. They should also ensure that the carer has all the service's contact details, so that they can get in touch with someone both within and outside of standard office hours.

It may be relevant, at this point, for the supervising social worker to ask the carer whether they are happy to accept direct requests for placements from the fostering service and the emergency duty system. If they are not confident enough for this, the worker can filter any requests for initial placements until all parties are certain that the carer feels able to respond to these directly. Even when a foster carer is happy to take direct requests from the duty service, they should be encouraged to discuss the child's needs with their supervising social worker before offering to care for that child. There have been situations where carers returning to panel for their first annual review have stated that they accepted the first placement offered because they were excited about the prospect, but that, with the benefit of hindsight, it was not appropriate for them. Carers in this position can feel deskilled and begin to wonder whether fostering is the right option for them. The first year of fostering is a time to build a carer's confidence. Therefore, initially, it may be appropriate for the supervising social worker to consider placements on their behalf. The worker could also assist the carer by helping them to draw up a checklist of questions to refer to when

contacted by a duty worker about the possible placement of a child. This will enable the carer to acquire as much relevant information about the child and their particular needs as possible.

In many agencies, it is standard practice for all placements to be discussed with the foster carer's supervising social worker or their manager during the carer's first year after approval, in order to aid the matching process.

CREATING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOSTER CARERS

During the first few months after a foster carer's approval, the supervising social worker's role is to make sure that the carer feels supported and able to seek advice and guidance, whilst also ensuring that they understand and are complying with fostering regulations and standards. Therefore, the two parties need to build a working relationship that enables the carer to share their thoughts and feelings, and allows the worker to maintain professional boundaries at all times. This means that the worker must perform a delicate balancing act, creating a close and trust-based relationship with the carer, whilst establishing enough authority to enable them to raise compliance or practice concerns when required. As the research review by Cosis Brown *et al* (2014) has shown (see Chapter 3), foster carers sometimes refer to their supervising social worker as their support worker, something which is, in part, correct. However, supervising social workers need to avoid slipping into the role of a foster carer's friend, particularly when they have worked with them for a long time.

In discussion with the author, a group of supervising social workers highlighted the issue of balancing professional and personal relationships with foster carers as one of the most difficult areas to negotiate. Foster carers and social workers are part of a professional network. Social workers often share personal information with their fellow professionals (for example, team members) when working with them over time, and many find that sharing a little detail can build a trusting working relationship of equals. They may, therefore, be tempted to share information with foster carers, particularly as they know full details of the carer's life history. However, sharing too much personal information with a carer can make it difficult to challenge their professional practice if this becomes necessary.

It may be appropriate for the supervising social worker to share some non-identifying information about their family situation with foster carers. For example, they could say that they are a parent and therefore can empathise with a situation, without providing any details about their children and their personal histories. It may also be appropriate for the

worker to share their personal feelings at times, so that the carer is aware that the worker identifies with their situation. However, this needs to be contained and within boundaries.

The group of supervising social workers mentioned above also discussed the dilemma that they faced in respect of how accessible they should be to carers. Foster carers are provided with their supervising social worker's work phone number, but should their calls be answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week, or should carers be directed to an emergency duty responder out of office hours? The supervising social workers felt that they often made themselves available to foster carers because they knew their situation and might be able to resolve an issue quickly, while the emergency duty system might not have the key information to hand. However, this can lead to dependency and expectations on behalf of foster carers that cannot always be met.

Each fostering service will have its own policy on this issue (and some will have their own out-of-hours support for foster carers), but the individual supervising social worker may have to gauge their response based on their knowledge of the carer and their current situation. It may be appropriate to ask carers to only phone their own supervising social worker before a certain time each day, and to contact the emergency duty system at other times, or to only ring the supervising social worker outside of normal working hours in emergencies.

Working relationships with two foster carers

When two foster carers are involved in a placement, the supervising social worker should also think about the roles played by each carer when beginning to build a relationship with them. If only the primary foster carer will be attending supervision sessions regularly, how will the worker build and sustain a relationship with the secondary carer? It is essential to build relationships with both carers in order to have an open and honest dialogue, and so that the worker can gauge the impact of fostering on all parties accurately. The worker could begin to establish rapport with the secondary carer by:

- booking supervision sessions at a time when the secondary carer is likely to be at home;
- phoning the secondary carer to check whether they have any concerns about fostering;
- making additional visits to the home when both carers are likely to be present;
- encouraging both carers to attend support groups and training sessions;
- arranging to meet with the secondary carer at a minimum of every three months, in line with good practice recommendations.

When a working relationship does not work out

There are times when the relationship between a supervising social worker and a carer does not work. This may be due to their personalities, or to differing approaches to communication. If difficulties occur, the supervising social worker should discuss this with their manager at an early stage to ensure that a positive working relationship with the carer can be maintained by the service. Prior to any change of supervising social worker, the issues causing strain should be explored and attempts at resolution should be made. Consideration should also be given as to whether the carer could be describing a poor working relationship as a diversion technique in order to avoid the service focusing on the quality of fostering being provided, as was found in some of the case reviews explored in Chapter 3.

When a change of supervising social worker is necessary, it should not be viewed as a failure on the part of the worker or an indicator that the carer is difficult to work with. Instead, it should simply be seen as a poor initial match. However, some services consider that, as professionals, foster carers and supervising social workers should always be able to work together. Whilst this is a valid argument, there is also a need to acknowledge that tensions in a working relationship can inhibit people from working to their full capacity, and this can impact on the child in placement, who should receive the best possible standards of care from the fostering service.

PROVIDING KEY INFORMATION TO FOSTER CARERS

During a foster carer's induction, it is important that the supervising social worker restates the information about the regulations for foster homes and the individual service's requirements for carers that should have been provided during the carer's initial training and assessment. This includes the areas listed below.

Explaining and conducting unannounced visits

NMS 10.5 requires that 'the foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of the foster children' (DfE, 2011, p 22), while NMS 21.8 states that all foster carers should receive 'at least one unannounced visit a year' (p 43).

These visits are usually carried out by the supervising social worker, although some services may use other workers within their team in order to introduce an element of independence. The supervising social worker should explain to the foster carer during their induction

that these visits will take place, and should make it clear that this is a requirement of the carer's registration. This will help to minimise the chances of any issues arising when the visits are carried out. The supervising social worker should also ensure that the carer understands the purpose of unannounced visits, which is to observe the standards of care being provided to the child. This includes checking that household standards are consistent throughout the home, and that the accommodation provided to any fostered child staying there is of a similar standard to that provided to everyone else in the property. Whenever possible on an unannounced visit, the child should be seen by the worker and their views sought.

During the visits, the supervising social worker should look at all areas of the property, including the garden and any outbuildings, to ensure that there are no safety issues that could place a child at risk. Some services combine these unannounced visits with updated health and safety property assessments.

Where staffing levels allow, it can be beneficial to carry out more than one unannounced visit a year. This will enable the worker to view the property during different seasons, and may allow them to see family life within the fostering household from different perspectives. Further insight can be obtained by varying the time of visits, for example, visiting at breakfast time or during early evening, so that the foster child can be seen when they are immersed in family life. The worker should make it clear to the carer that they cannot refuse these visits except in exceptional circumstances, such as when a member of the household is seriously ill and cannot be disturbed.

All unannounced visits should be recorded. The example form in Appendix 1, provided by Lighthouse Fostering (an independent fostering service based in Kent), shows the issues that should be covered and included in the report. In this example, the service focuses on the child's lived experience in the household and the observed interactions in the foster home, as well as on conditions within the home.

Health and safety assessments

A foster carer's assessing social worker will carry out a home safety check as part of the assessment process. However, during the induction, the supervising social worker should make it clear to the carer that they, in partnership with the worker, have an obligation to constantly review their home in order to identify and resolve safety issues. The supervising social worker should discuss the fact that the carer should balance the need to keep children safe with the need to ensure that they can have a normal family life. They should also make sure that the carer has informed the companies providing their home and car insurance that

they are now fostering, as failing to do so may invalidate their policies and not all health and safety assessments cover this.

Health and safety checks are required to ensure that the following NMS are met:

10.1 The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child.

10.2 The foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. Outdoor spaces which are part of the premises are safe, secure and well maintained.

10.3 Foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.

(DfE, 2011, p 22)

Supervising social workers also need to stress to foster carers that these checks are a requirement of fostering regulations and that there is an onus on them to report any relevant changes in their home conditions. Some supervising social workers review health and safety as part of their unannounced visits, while others do this prior to annual reviews, but these reviews should always be on their agenda.

The supervising social worker should ensure that the foster carer is aware that they need to notify them if:

- there are new people planning to live in the foster home;
- adults in the household change their employment, especially when their new role is home-based and clients or colleagues may visit the home, or the person is working shifts;
- a new pet is added to the household, as a pet assessment may need to take place;
- there are building works in progress at the home or major changes are being made to the outside area, such the installation of a pond or hot tub, as these need to be inspected to ensure that all safety requirements are met;
- guns are being stored in the household, as these must be stored in a lockable gun cabinet and only the gun licence/key holder should know where the key is kept. The worker should also ensure that the ammunition is being stored separately from the firearms – ideally, it should be kept in another building.

The supervising social worker should ensure that the health and safety assessment is updated to take account of any new risks identified

whenever there is a new placement. If there is a proposal that fostered children over the age of three should share a bedroom, the worker should conduct a separate bedroom sharing risk assessment. It is also good practice to conduct a health and safety assessment each year as a minimum requirement, even if no new placements have been made.

Each fostering service tends to produce its own health and safety checklist. However, a good example of a health and safety assessment form (along with excellent advice) is included in Adams' book, *Undertaking Checks and References in Fostering and Adoption Assessments* (2019a, pp 141–144).

Medical checks

Every foster carer should have a medical assessment as part of their fostering assessment, but services have differing requirements in terms of when and how these should be updated. Good practice is to carry out an update of the foster carer's health every two or three years, or if a substantial change in a carer's health has been observed. CoramBAAF has created a report template that can be used to undertake this. However, some services prefer to use their own format, while others ask their carers to complete a self-assessment form that may be reviewed by the service's medical adviser.

The supervising social worker should ensure that these medical assessments are completed in line with service policy, but also highlight the need for an early assessment if they become aware of a health condition that may be impacting on a foster carer's ability to meet a child's needs. It is important for the worker to help carers to understand that fostering is a demanding occupation and that they need to ensure that all of their own health needs are met in order to provide care for a child. The worker should also stress that, in many cases, having a medical condition will not mean that the carer will need to stop fostering; however, it may mean that the carer will need to be reassessed and they may require some personal support so that they can continue to fulfil their role.

This may be particularly relevant for family and friends carers, many of whom are grandparents and likely to be older, and therefore to have more underlying health conditions, than non-connected foster carers. As a result, they may worry that if they experience changes to their health, it will mean that they can no longer care for the child. The worker should ensure that the carer understands that the child's needs come first and that, whenever possible, if the child's primary need is to be with that particular carer, additional support should be provided to enable that placement to continue.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

These are checks used to record and analyse a person's past (in Scotland, they are undertaken by the Vetting and Barring Service). They look specifically at any convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings they may have received. They are carried out at the point of assessment for foster carers, and most services review them at least every three years.

The supervising social worker's role is to explain to each carer that these checks will be repeated regularly and that if they or members of the fostering household commit any kind of offence, they should share this information with the worker immediately, so that the service can make any relevant checks, complete any reports required by the service, and consider the implications for any child in the foster home. The safer caring policy (below) may need to be updated, for example, as there might be a risk to the child in placement.

National Minimum Standards

Both fostering services and fostering panels consider whether foster carers meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS). As mentioned in Chapter 2, in England the NMS are issued under section 23 of the Care Standards Act, and were last updated in 2011. They cover the values and principles expected of foster care providers, and services are expected to ensure that they meet and exceed these standards. The NMS are based on the concept that all children should have enjoyable childhoods and be able to benefit from excellent parenting and education.

The role of the supervising social worker in relation to the NMS is to:

- ensure that they are conversant with them;
- ensure that the carers they are supporting are familiar with them; and
- assess whether the carers are providing care that would enable the service to meet these standards.

Where a supervising social worker organises a support group for their foster carers, they could usefully hold discussions about the NMS and encourage the group to share ideas about how the service can meet and exceed particular standards. This will help to reinforce the concept of continuous improvement and development of foster carers to provide the best possible experience for children in care.

Whether they are working with foster carers as individual households or as a group, the supervising social worker could identify one of the key NMS and ask the foster carer/s to think about what that standard would look like in practice when caring for a child. For example, NMS 3.2 requires foster carers to 'provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour' (DfE, 2011, p 12).

The supervising social worker could ask each carer to describe how they would translate this into practice and what these actions would look like in everyday life in their household. This type of discussion could also be undertaken with carers to enable them to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards.

Safer caring policies

It is good practice for fostering services to have a safer caring policy in place for each fostering household, and an individual safer caring policy in place for each child in foster care. Slade (2012) states that 'family safer caring plans are documents that are a means of making sure that everyone in the fostering household understands the principles and rules for living together' (p 79). The fostering household's safer caring policy should be reviewed as part of the preparation for the carer's annual review, and should be updated when there are any significant household changes. The worker should ensure that all members of the household are familiar with the safer caring policy.

The individual child's safer caring policy should be created at the point of placement and reviewed when a new placement is made, whenever there are any significant safeguarding issues, or when changes for the child take place.

These safer caring policies are designed to ensure the well-being and safety of both the child and the fostering household, and to protect them, as far as possible, from abuse or allegations of abuse. As part of the safer caring policy, individual risk assessments may be needed relating to the specific child. These may relate to risks *for* the child or young person, such as absconding, self-harming or use of drugs and alcohol, risks *to* the young person from family members or associates, and risks *from* one young person towards another. There may also be specific risks to the foster family, for example, from a young person's associates. Any risk assessment should clearly detail the risk, the indicators that an issue might be occurring, and the plan to mitigate that risk, which should be agreed by all relevant parties.

CoramBAAF has created a Form R for risk assessment, which can be used alongside Adams' guide, *Devising and Updating Risk Assessment and Management Plans in Fostering* (2021).

Record-keeping

The supervising social worker should explain to foster carers that they will monitor and quality assure the records that the carers keep in respect of placements during the first year that they are fostering, and that they will continue to quality assure recordings throughout their fostering career. This includes ensuring that the carers clearly

differentiate between their observations and their opinions when creating them. This is a skill that foster carers develop over time, and a subject that the supervising social worker can discuss with them on an ongoing basis during supervision. A guiding principle is for the carer to keep in mind that the child is the key audience, as the records, of course, are about them, and they may well read these in the near or distant future (some carers encourage young people to contribute to their diary recordings). That does not mean that negative or difficult content should be avoided; more that it should be written in such a way that allows for understanding and does not shame the child. Children can also be greatly helped by looking back at the progress they have made. Many services are now writing any reports about a young person directly to the child, and this would be a good skill for carers to develop.

Some services provide their foster carers with a template for record-keeping, while others prefer to allow them to use their own personal formats. Whichever format carers use, the information that they record needs to be evidenced and non-judgemental. Supervising social workers need to ensure that their carers are informed about the availability of training courses on recording skills, and should facilitate their attendance on these.

When working with some foster carers, the supervising social worker will need to discuss specific issues, such as the quantity of record keeping required, the need to achieve a balance between positives and areas of concern, and the timelines for the submission of written records. They can also assist the carer by providing an example of a comprehensive record (of an imaginary child) at the start of their fostering career, and constructive criticism of the records that the carer submits to them. Good record keeping is not only important as a record of the child's time with the carer, but can help to protect the carer against allegations.

Storage of children's records and documentation should be discussed with the foster carer before their first placement. Some services allow carers to access their dedicated IT systems and store all documentation and recordings there. Others provide carers with encrypted USB sticks that must be kept in a locked drawer and returned at the end of the child's placement. Other services ask carers to store recordings on their own home computers and to email these to the service, in which case carers' computers need to be password protected. Copies of all documentation held by the carer should be placed on the child's electronic file when the placement ends, and all records need to be deleted permanently from the carer's computer once the child has left the placement. If paper copies of any documentation have been held, these should be returned to the fostering service to either be placed on the child's file or destroyed.

In the past, foster carers were often advised by trainers and social workers to keep duplicate records relating to children placed with them in case a historical allegation of abuse was made against them. However, supervising social workers should be very clear that this should not occur, as there are no legal grounds for a carer to retain such records. More information on this issue, as well as other matters relating to data protection, can be found in the guide by Adams and Jordan (2019).

The supervising social worker should also, at an early stage, discuss the importance of constructing physical or virtual memory boxes with the foster carer. Memory boxes provide children with a record of their stay in a foster household, and catalogue events that have occurred and the child's achievements while living there. The memory box should be provided to the child in its entirety when they leave the placement, but should also be available for them to view during their stay in the household.

PROVIDING FOSTER CARERS AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH SUPPORT

Facilitating peer support

The supervising social worker can provide a carer in their first year of fostering with significant support by linking them with a buddy foster carer. The buddy should be an experienced carer – for example, a carer who has a similar approval category or family structure to the new foster carer. This means that the buddy may have faced some of the same concerns as the new foster carer during their first few placements and may be able to offer them advice, particularly during weekends and evenings when social work support may not be so readily available. The buddy may also be able to take the new foster carer to a support group and introduce them to other carers. New foster carers often find it easier to ask buddies questions about what to expect from their placements and request support from them, particularly if they feel that the concerns they have are minor.

The Mockingbird Programme

This model of support for foster carers was introduced in the UK by the Fostering Network in 2015, under licence from the Mockingbird Society in the US. The aim of the project is to replicate extended family support networks by bringing together six to ten “satellite” fostering households, with a “hub home” operated by an experienced foster carer, supported by a social worker. The hub home offers support, guidance and training to the foster carers, and planned and emergency sleepovers for the children placed in satellite homes. It also organises group activities.

A review of the project undertaken by Ott *et al* for the DfE in 2020 found that the project showed, amongst other positives, ‘promising findings around improving well-being for foster carers [and] improving foster carer support’ (p 25). Further information about this programme is available from the Fostering Network. Obviously, this programme cannot be established by an individual supervising social worker, as it needs a fostering service to commit to making a change in operating model. However, supervising social workers may find it helpful to consider how the project works and foster carers’ perceptions of it. In addition, some concepts from the scheme could be adapted to how peer support is used for carers, such as buddy foster carers being the providers of regular sleepovers for the children of the carers with whom they are buddied.

Introducing foster carers to support groups

Many fostering services require their carers to attend support groups regularly. Not only can participating in these groups enable carers to support each other, but the groups can also be used by the fostering service as vehicles for raising issues relating to all foster carers and providing carers with information about service policies or changes to legislation. It can be daunting for a new foster carer to join an established support group. Therefore, the supervising social worker needs to ensure that the carer understands the group’s purpose, and should facilitate their introduction to it, perhaps by accompanying them to a first session and introducing them to other carers, or by arranging for a buddy foster carer to do this. Often, support groups include a learning/training element that can be useful to new carers and provide evidence for their training records.

Supporting other children in the foster home

It is important to remember that fostering will result in changes to family life, not only for the foster carers but also for any other children in

the household, whether they are full-time residents or, for example, children who live elsewhere but who visit at weekends and during holidays. The impact on the children of the foster family may be positive, as they may forge strong links with the children joining their family. However, the presence of more children in the household could also mean that they have less individual time with their parents.

The lives of the children in the foster family may be impacted by changes in household rules and norms to comply with safe caring policies, and they may be considered by their foster carer parents to be role models for the fostered children, an ideal that is not always easy to live up to. They may witness children being abusive to their parents or behaving in a way they themselves would not be allowed to, and their belongings may also be taken or damaged. Foster children may have an impact on the children of the foster family's friendship groups or sibling relationships, and the dynamics of these relationships may change as a result. The foster family's children may also feel profound loss when a foster child moves on.

The other children in the foster family will experience major changes in their lives through being involved in fostering, so they need to be considered and supported from the moment that the foster carers are approved. Their support needs will vary depending on their age and unique situations.

Höjer *et al's* journal paper, 'The impact of fostering on foster carers' children: an international literature review', concluded that:

- involving the foster carers' children 'in the decision to foster enhances subsequent adaptation';
- keeping the foster carers' children 'informed about fostering and each particular child reduces conflicts';
- 'foster carers need to identify "protected" time for their children';
- some children of foster carers would rather only have limited information (including limited sensitive information) about the children placed with their family;
- when foster carers' children are 'allowed to discuss openly perceived difficulties with fostering' with their parents and social workers, it improves their 'capacity to cope';
- 'preparing carers' children for the ending of placements' is important (2013, p 19).

Therefore, the supervising social worker should consider how each child in the household can be supported individually. Services have successfully used the following initiatives to support children within foster families:

- providing them with regular individual sessions with the supervising social worker;
- encouraging the foster carer to have protected time with their child;
- enabling the young person to contact the supervising social worker if a situation arises with which they need help;
- linking them with a buddy – a child from an experienced foster family;
- encouraging them to attend groups for the families of foster carers;
- inviting them to a virtual group for the children of foster carers;
- allowing them to join part of their parent’s supervision sessions (this option is more suitable for teenagers or young adults, and needs careful consideration to ensure that confidentiality for the foster child is maintained);
- offering them the opportunity to attend family group meetings of the whole household, which are facilitated by the supervising social worker.

In addition, the Fostering Network celebrates carers’ children via Sons and Daughters Month, which takes place annually in October. They have created podcasts, certificates and letters that fostering services can use and adapt.

Supporting family and friends carers

Careful thought needs to be given to ensuring that family and friends carers understand why they need to meet the fostering standards. They are often assessed as foster carers during times of family crisis, and frequently in a shorter than usual timescale. Therefore, they may not have had the same opportunities as non-connected applicants to consider the requirements of foster caring and its demands on their time, or the training and development requirements involved. They may well identify themselves by their relationship with the child (e.g. a grandparent) rather than in the role of a professional foster carer, and may need time to adjust to what is being asked of them, and to appreciate the benefits of the training and support available to them.

The supervising social worker could help a family and friends carer by pairing them with a mentor who is an experienced kinship carer, and/or by introducing them to a dedicated support group for family and friends carers, where they can gain knowledge from the experiences of other foster carers in their position.

SUMMARY

Induction for foster carers takes time, but skilful input from the supervising social worker at the start of a carer's fostering career and the establishment of a support package for all members of the fostering family can provide the scaffolding necessary for new foster carers to become successful fostering households.

The next chapter continues to explore the supervising social worker's role in supporting the development of foster carers by discussing the review process.