



Children's Safeguarding and Social Work

Corporate Parenting Service

Placement with parents policy

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1 Legal and policy framework

Placement with parents may be considered as a placement option for any child who is subject to an interim or full care order where the placement is reasonably practical and consistent with their safety and welfare.

However, placement with parents cannot be considered as a placement option if it would be incompatible with any court order for contact with regard to the child, for example where contact with the parent has been restricted or terminated.

Children may be placed with parents because:

- the court orders that they remain at home on an interim care order during care proceedings until the final hearing or that they be placed with parents on granting a full care order **or**
- parents whose child is in foster care have made good progress in addressing concerns about parenting capacity and social workers wish to test a return home to see if rehabilitation is likely to be successful.

2 Deciding on placement with parents

The key purpose of placing the child with their parents is that social workers can retain a level of control and supervision of the placement and monitor the parent's capacity to care for the child care whilst working with parents towards the eventual discharge of the care order.

When deciding on a placement with parents, social workers need to ensure that assessment addresses all known risks and balances these against the advantages of child living at home and how to adequately monitor the placement and ensure the child's safety and welfare.

The following considerations should be explored:

- levels of concern within the professional network
- age and level of vulnerability of the child
- wishes and feelings of parents and children regarding a placement at home
- parent's level of engagement and co-operation with CSSW and other agencies
- extent to which parents are working to address issues that affect parenting capacity
- child's level of needs and parent's assessed ability to provide adequate care for the child and meet these needs

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- whether parent's accept CSSW concerns about their care of the child
- for older children, whether they are likely to return home from other placements
- likelihood of a successful rehabilitation in a timescale that is right for the child.

Before a decision can be made and placements at home begin, the following steps must be completed:

- social workers must carry out an assessment of the parent's suitability to care for the child, the suitability of the household members and the accommodation
- a statutory CLA review must be held
- the child, parents and professional network must be consulted
- the Director of CSSW must formally authorise the placement.

3 Assessing placement suitability

All assessments must be recorded on the suitability assessment record (available on MOSAIC) and should focus on the suitability of the parents to care for the child, as well as the suitability of household members and the accommodation.

3.1 Parenting capacity

The assessment must look at the extent to which the factors affecting parenting capacity that led to a care order being granted have been addressed and parenting capacity improved, as well as parent's ability to sustain changes. Social workers should also look at what support and services need to be in place to help parents overcome difficulties and improve capacity.

The parent's past history of child care will need to be taken into account so social workers should review any previous CSSW case records for that child and any siblings who may have been removed from the parent's care.

3.2 Household

Social workers should focus on family functioning and the quality of relationships within the family. The impact of any recent changes to household composition must also be explored, especially if children are returning home from foster care.

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Assessment of adult members of the household must include their capacity to care for the child and their own family history. Where there are young people aged under 18 living at home, social workers should assess their history and current lifestyles.

Assessment should also look at the possible caring role of significant adults who do not live in the household but will have a high level of contact with the child, including their suitability and their relationship with the parents and the child.

3.3 Accommodation

Social workers should visit the family home to assess the suitability of the accommodation, including:

- living conditions: the home should be warm, adequately furnished, and free from any avoidable hazards.
- sleeping arrangements: these should be appropriate and adequate with regard to the age and sex of the child.
- hygiene: the home, in particular the kitchen, should reach a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.
- safety: safety issues such as garden ponds need to be addressed depending on the child's age. Parents may need help in purchasing safety equipment, for example, stair gates.
- pets: consideration should be given to any issues arising from the parent's pets and whether these pose a risk to the child.

3.4 Medical checks

Parents who will be caring for the child should ask their GP to provide Camden with a medical report as part of their assessment of suitability and how the state of their physical and mental health may affect their ability to care for the child. The information should be recorded on BAAF form AH by their GP and returned to the social worker.

If the health assessment raises any health issues that may impact on the parent's ability to look after the child, social workers may request advice from Camden's medical advisor based in the Crowndale Health Centre.

3.5 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

DBS checks should be carried out on parents/carers and all members of the household who are aged 16 and above. Social workers should liaise with administrators in Children's Provision regarding organising the checks.

3.6 Authorising placements with parents

All placements with parents must be agreed at the statutory CLA review and authorised by the CSSW Director. The social worker seeking agreement must ensure that all relevant documents are made available. When authorising the placement, the Director should ensure:

- a full assessment of suitability has been carried out
- the child and the parent's wishes regarding the placement have been sought
- the placement is the most suitable placement for the child and is able to safeguard and promote their welfare
- the child's IRO has been consulted on the placement.

Any agreement relating to a placement with parents must be recorded on the child's MOSAIC case record.

3.7 Immediate placements

There may be situations where it is necessary to place a child with their parent in an emergency, either because the child has remained at home at the onset of care proceedings or has returned home following the breakdown of a foster placement and rehabilitation is the long-term care plan.

Before any immediate placement can take effect, social workers must carry out the following tasks before the child is placed:

- interviewing the parent and any other members of the household
- ascertaining the household composition
- inspecting the accommodation
- obtaining information about other members of the household or significant adults
- gathering information for the suitability assessment.

Social workers should approach the CAIT for a police check on all adult members of the household and other significant adults under the division's Police Checks policy. <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/media/3179/police-checks.doc>

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Immediate placements may be authorised by the team manager but within 10 working days:

- the social worker must have completed the assessment
- the CSSW Director must have made a decision regarding the placement
- if the placement is authorised, arrangements must be in place for a statutory CLA review to take place
- if the placement is not authorised, it is terminated and an alternative placement found.

4 Placement arrangements

Once the date of the placement at home has been agreed, social workers should ensure that CLA Business Support are aware of the change and that statutory notifications are sent out.

Every placement at home must be covered by a placement with parents agreement plan record between CSSW and the parent, that is available in the placement arrangement meeting episode on MOSAIC. The record should be completed at the placement agreement meeting which should be held prior to or within 5 working days of the placement beginning.

The following areas need to be covered at the meeting so that parents are clear about expectations:

- Parents need to be made aware of the overall aims of the placement regarding rehabilitation and the standards of care expected.
- Whilst parental responsibility will be shared between Camden and the parents, it is a matter of negotiation as to how parents are able to exercise parental responsibility for the child on a day to day basis. This should be clearly set out giving a clear indication as to those decisions that are delegated to parents and those which are retained by CSSW.
- If the placement at home is with a father who does not have parental responsibility, he should be encouraged to acquire this; social workers should discuss the matter with Legal Services.
- The social worker and parents should ensure the child will receive universal services such as education and health care, as well as any specialist or targeted services that need to be provided in order to meet any specific needs identified in the assessment.

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- Parents should be aware of how often social workers will visit the placement and for what purpose.
- placement agreement plans should set out clearly the circumstances under which the placement will be terminated and that parents are aware of what action will be taken if the placement ends.

Parents should be aware of what support packages will be provided to meet the child's needs and support the placement. Services should support the child to live at home by:

- helping parents to improve parenting skills or address their own issues
- ensuring continued support to the child around their own identified needs
- providing a resource to help the family rebuild their relationships.

Social workers should be aware that as the child remains looked after, the procedures around health assessments and Personal Education Plans will continue to apply to children who are placed with parents.

5 Monitoring placements

Placements at home with parents remain CLA placements and are subject to the same procedures for statutory visits and reviews. Monitoring should ensure that:

- the child's welfare is safeguarded and promoted
- the placement is meeting their identified needs
- the placement agreement is being adhered to
- the placement remains the most appropriate placement choice for the child.

Statutory visits to the placement should be within 1 week of the start of the placement then at intervals of once every 6 weeks. Social workers should also carry out additional visits including some unannounced visits. If the child is placed with parents prior to the assessment being completed, visits must be at a frequency of once every week until the assessment has been completed.

As part of the visit, social workers should observe the interactions of the child, parent and other household members to see if the placement remains viable and is in the child's best interests. There should be feedback regarding the visit to the child and parent so that they have an opportunity to discuss issues and make any changes to enhance the placement. The social worker should also see the child alone during each visit and ascertain the wishes and feelings.

Statutory reviews of placements with parents should be held in line with division's monitoring and review of placements policy. As part of the review process, social workers must assess whether the need for a care order remains and every review should consider applying for a discharge of the order and look at what continued support will be provided the family following discharge.

6 Ending placements with parents

A placement with parents may come to an end either because the rehabilitation plan is successful and the care order is discharged or it is decided that the placement does not offer a suitable permanent home for the child due to concerns about their safety and welfare.

Social workers need to be able to recognise when a placement with parents needs extra support to be successful, and equally when rehabilitation is no longer the best permanence option for the child and an alternative permanent placement needs to be found.

It is only through close monitoring of the placement, regular reviews of the care plan and seeing and talking to the child that social workers will be able to gather information to support good decision-making with regard to this.

6.1 Discharge from care

A decision to discharge the child from care should be taken at the child's CLA review following recommendation from the social worker and team manager, once the child's care plan has been fully implemented. The social worker is responsible for liaising with legal services to apply to discharge the care order.

Social workers should refer to the "Moving on from care" policy for further information on providing on-going support to children once they are discharged from the care system. <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/media/3202/ending-placements-and-moving-on-from-care.pdf>

6.2 Supporting placements in crisis

If a placement is in danger of disrupting but is still considered to be a viable option for the child, social workers should consult with the child's IRO and consider convening a planning meeting to look at what extra resources can be made available to support the placement.

6.3 Moving to an alternative placement

Where it is clear that a placement at home is no longer in the child's best interest and cannot safeguard and promote their welfare, this should be acknowledged and action taken to move the child to an alternative placement. Wherever possible, this should be planned to minimise disruption to the child.

Children and the parents may be deeply affected when a placement at home does not work out. It is important that social workers spend time talking to children and parents about the reasons why the placement cannot continue, and help them to come to terms with this prior to moving on.

The decision to terminate the placement should be taken by the CLA team manager, in consultation with the social worker and the IRO. Following this decision, the social worker should convene a disruption meeting to look at the reasons for the placement breakdown and what support should be provided to the child and the family following this.

The meeting should also look at the long term plans for the child and consider what changes need to be made to their care plan, which should be amended by the social worker.