



**Children's Safeguarding and
Family Help**

Corporate Parenting Service
Parent and child placements

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1. Purpose and scope of policy

This policy relates to arrangements where children and their parents go to live in a fostering household for a period of time but the parent remains the child's main carer.

This type of placement is known as a "parent and child arrangement" and may be used:

- as a means of assessing parenting capacity either pre-proceedings or as part of a court ordered assessment during proceedings in order to inform decisions on the child's future care: **or**
- to support a young mother who is looked after in order to help her develop vital parenting skills and continue with her education whilst preparing for independence.

The key issue with these arrangements is how caring responsibilities for the child are shared between parents and the foster carer and the role of the foster carer in monitoring and assessing parental capacity and safeguarding the child's welfare.

These arrangements can be fraught with difficulties and in order to effectively safeguard the child and manage potential conflict between the needs of the parent and the child, a clear agreement on respective roles and responsibilities must be made in advance.

Arrangements that are being used for the purposes of assessing parental capacity will be time-limited to the duration of the assessment. Arrangements to nurture and support young parents who are looked after will continue until the young person is considered able to manage in independent accommodation whilst caring for their child.

2. Legal framework

2.1 Arrangements under section 17

These will be arrangements where the parent is over 18 and the child is not looked after but a parenting assessment is being carried out as part of pre-proceedings to decide on the child's future care. The arrangement will be made on a voluntary basis with the consent of parents who will retain parental responsibility.

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The arrangement will not be regulated by fostering regulations and the child will not be subject to care planning regulations. However, the roles and responsibilities of parents and the carer regarding the care of the child must be clearly recorded in an agreement between CSSW, the parent, and the foster carer so that everyone is aware of roles, responsibilities and expectations.

As a major safeguard, any agreement should make clear to the parent and foster carer the circumstances under which the voluntary nature of the arrangement may be ended and what actions may be taken by CSSW to secure the child's welfare.

2.2 Child is voluntarily accommodated

These are arrangements where the parent is over 18 but has agreed to the child being looked after whilst assessment is carried out within the foster home.

This arrangement is likely to be used where there are some concerns about the child's safety and welfare (for example the child is subject to child protection procedures) and CSSW believe it is in the child's best interest to become looked after in order to facilitate this arrangement.

The child will be placed under section 22 of the Children Act 1989 and will be subject to care planning regulations and parents will retain parental responsibility. The placement will be subject to fostering regulations.

It is essential that as parents retain the main caring role, the placement plan details the foster carer's role, in particular their role in monitoring and assessing the parent's care of the child.

2.3 Child is subject to an Interim Care Order

During proceedings, where the court has ordered a parenting assessment and the child is subject to an interim care order, Camden may choose to place the child and parent with a foster carer in order to carry out the assessment. The child will be subject to care planning regulations and the placement will be subject to fostering regulations.

Parental responsibility will be shared by the parent and the council. Again, the placement plan agreement must set out details of the foster carer's role in monitoring and assessing the parent's care of the child but should reflect the child's legal status and the fact that the council may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of the parent in order to safeguard the child's welfare.

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2.4 Parent is a looked after child

The purpose of these placements will be to support the parent in their role in caring for their child and help them to develop the necessary skills so that they are able to continue to care for their child on reaching independence.

The placement will also focus on the parent's own needs, helping them to continue with their education or training so that they can fulfil their potential and prepare them for a successful transition to independence.

Achieving these goals may require a certain level of shared care between the parent and the foster carer and any agreements relating to care arrangements should be recorded in the placement plan.

The child may not be looked after themselves but this will depend on assessment of the young person's parenting capacity and the risk of significant harm to their child. It is an expectation that a pre-birth assessment has been carried out to inform decisions on the status of the child.

The placement will be regulated by fostering regulations and care planning regulations will apply to the parent and the child as well if they become looked after.

3 Parent and child arrangements for assessment

3.1 Criteria for use of the arrangement

Parent and child arrangements are unique and offer social workers an opportunity to assess parenting capacity whilst monitoring the child's development and ensuring their safety.

However, it is likely that the use of fostering households may not always be suitable in all cases, and there will be times where risks are too high to be contained in such an arrangement.

All cases must be subject to a risk assessment before a decision is made on use of fostering households for these placements (see section 5.5), and the assessment should look at whether the arrangements are able to adequately safeguard the child. Risk assessments should look at parenting capacity, any child protection issues and the child's legal or child protection status.

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The following cases may not be considered suitable for a parent and child arrangement in a fostering household:

- There is a very high level of concern about parenting capacity.
- The parent requires an exceptionally high level of supervision or vigilance.
- The child has a very high level of needs that would be difficult to manage in a fostering household.
- It may be difficult for the foster carer to manage external risks from family members or violent partners.
- The parent needs to enter rehabilitation for substance misuse treatment.
- The parent is under treatment for serious mental ill health.
- The parent has a history of running away from placements or there is a risk they will take the baby out of the fostering household.
- The parent has a caution or conviction for a specific offence that means they cannot be part of a fostering household.

In these cases, social workers and the Resource team will need to consider using a residential placement instead if a parenting assessment is still seen as a viable option.

One of the key research messages is that parent and child arrangements are generally only successful where the parent is fully committed to the placement and is co-operating with the assessment. Parental engagement and the likelihood of the arrangement being successful in terms of completing the assessment should be a key factor in deciding whether or not to go ahead with the arrangement.

3.2 Seeking legal advice

It is likely that most parent and child arrangements will come about during care proceedings. However, CSSW may decide to use this arrangement to assess parenting capacity as part of pre-proceedings steps.

It is possible to place a parent and child in a fostering household for assessment under section 17 with the agreement of the parent, but this may only be suitable if there is a low level of risk, the child's welfare can be safeguarded adequately and the parent is likely to co-operate with the arrangements.

If there are any concerns about the child's safety due to parenting capacity or other parental issues such as domestic abuse, mental ill health or substance misuse, or a danger of the parent absconding from the arrangement with the child, social workers

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and managers should consider using voluntary accommodation or seek an interim care order to strengthen safeguarding capacity.

It is recommended that legal advice is sought as part of the pre-proceedings legal planning meeting before any arrangements are agreed to discuss possible legal action to safeguard the child.

3.3 Requests to the Resource team

Requests to the Resource team need to be made as far as possible in advance, and before the birth of the child if possible. It is essential that there is a discussion with the Resource team regarding the suitability of using a fostering household for a parent and child arrangement.

Social workers should complete the *Request for parent and child placement record*, available on MOSAIC and should contact the team by telephone to discuss the arrangements. It should be clear from the request that the arrangement is needed for assessment purposes.

If it is agreed that a fostering household will not be able to support the arrangements, the Resources team will then search for a suitable residential placement.

4 Placements for looked after children who are parents

4.1 Policy

It is Camden's policy to support looked after young mothers to care for their child and to involve fathers in their child's lives if this is consistent with the child's welfare. Camden will ensure:

- Looked after young parents receive advice on services and benefits
- the professional network, including social workers, midwives and health visitors, provide high quality support during pregnancy and in the early stages of parenthood
- mothers and their babies are placed together in a suitable foster placement that can meet their needs where this is in their best interests.

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However, as Camden has a duty to safeguard the welfare of both the parent and the child and manage any risks, a pre-birth assessment will be carried out for all looked after young women who become pregnant. As a result of the pre-birth assessment, CSSW will decide on whether it is feasible to place the child with the parent.

Research shows that young women who are looked after are likely to experience more negative attitudes from professionals who may make assumptions about their ability to care for their child based solely on their looked after status. Social workers need to be mindful of this when assessing and working with looked after young parents.

4.2 Purpose of placement

Parent and child arrangements for looked after young mothers are a preferred option for young parents as it provides them with an opportunity to live within a stable family environment and receive support in looking after their child from an experienced carer who can act as a mentor and role model.

Arrangements will be concerned with meeting the needs of both the parent and their child, but will also need to provide a warm, stable and supportive environment that safeguards and promotes the welfare of both the parent and child and encourages the parent to care for their child.

The foster carer will have a key role in:

- supporting the parent to care for their child and teaching vital parenting skills
- safeguarding and monitoring the welfare of the child
- supporting the parent to continue with education and training
- helping the parent to develop skills and move on to independence.

In order to achieve these goals, parents will need help with child care, perhaps with the carer looking after the baby whilst the parent continues with their education or training. Arrangements for shared care will need to be discussed and agreed before the placement begins.

One of the key factors in the success of parent and child arrangements is a prior relationship between the foster carer and the parent. For this reason, the Fostering Service will aim to make any necessary arrangements so that the parent can remain with their foster carer if this is possible.

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4.3 Making arrangements

As soon as it is known that a looked after young woman is pregnant, the following needs to happen:

- The allocated social worker should carry out a pre-birth assessment and support the young woman to engage with ante-natal services in partnership with the foster carer.
- Any concerns about the unborn child's welfare should be discussed with a child protection IRO and a strategy meeting and a legal planning meeting convened if required.
- The IRO should be consulted on bringing forward the young woman's next statutory review in order to plan for the child's birth.
- Discussions should take place with the Resource team/Fostering Service to look at possible parent and child placements, including whether the young person can stay with their current carer and what training the carer will need to facilitate this.

5 Matching

5.1 Policy

- The Fostering service will only match parents and their children with foster carers who have been specifically assessed and trained to offer parent and child foster care and whose accommodation is deemed suitable.
- All matching decisions will be made in accordance with the Fostering Service matching policy.
- When making decisions on these arrangements, the Fostering Service will take into account the needs of the fostering household and in particular, any looked after child who is already living in the household.
- A fostering household where foster children are currently living may only take on a parent and child arrangement if there are two approved carers in the household.

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- All potential matches will be subject to a robust risk assessment before being confirmed. Where the Fostering Service believes the level of risk is too high to contain within a fostering household, this will be fed back to the Resources team.
- It is Camden's policy that a fostering household should have only one parent and child arrangement on-going at any given time.
- As the success of the arrangement will be based on good communications and shared values between the parent and foster carer, the Fostering Service will ensure that there is a good match in terms of ethnicity, religion and language.
- Where possible, priority will be given to matches where there is already an existing relationship between the parent and the foster carer.
- Where an older child of the parent will be part of the arrangement, their needs will also be considered in matching decisions.
- The Fostering Service may choose a fostering household at a distance from Camden where it is deemed necessary either to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or ensure the safety of the parent and the success of the arrangement.

5.2 Requirements of fostering households

The fostering household should provide a warm, stable and supportive environment that encourages the parent to care for the child whilst affording the foster carer an opportunity to safeguard the child's welfare and monitor parental progress.

Where the purpose of the placement is to carry out a parenting assessment, the foster carer must have the skills to carry out the necessary monitoring and assessment tasks, including recording information, and be able to offer practical advice and support to the parent around child care.

As the parent may have specific presenting difficulties, such as mental health issues or substance misuse problems, it is desirable that the foster carer has some knowledge and experience of these and how they may impact on parenting capacity.

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Where the placement is for a looked after young mother and her child, foster carers should have experience of caring for young babies and teenagers and have specific skills needed to help young parents learn how to care for their child and help them to cope with the demands of the task.

In addition, foster carers will need to work with the parent to ensure they are in receipt of all services and benefits that they will be entitled to and work in partnership with the professional network to support the parent.

The foster carer will also need to meet the needs of the young parent, ensuring they have time and space to develop their own potential, continue with education and training and have an opportunity to take on increasing responsibility for their lives and their child's care prior to making the transition to independent living.

5.3 Risk assessment

All potential matches must be jointly risk assessed by children's social workers and supervising social workers before being agreed, focusing on any risks the parent may present to others in the fostering household, especially other looked after children. In particular, the following areas must be considered:

- criminal convictions, cautions or police involvement
- history of abuse, violence or domestic violence
- history of arson or damage to property
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- substance misuse
- self-harming
- absconding from placement
- medical conditions
- mental health issues.

It is essential that any proposed arrangement is able to contain and manage risks and that foster carers are aware of potential issues and how to deal with them. Fostering households should also review their safe caring policy with the supervising social worker before any arrangements go ahead.

Risk assessment may also show that the risks inherent in the arrangements are too high to contain in a fostering household and that a residential setting may be more appropriate.

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A risk assessment should also be carried out on the parent's partner or extended family to establish whether they pose a risk to the child, parent or the fostering household. It may be necessary to withhold the placement address from partners and family members in some circumstances.

Risk assessments will not uncover all issues so it is important that foster carers remain vigilant and report any problems or risks to the child's social worker and the supervising social worker during the course of the arrangements.

5 Planning for placement

6.1 Policy framework

All placements for children (or parents) that have looked after status are subject to care planning and fostering regulations and must comply with the relevant divisional policies on placements.

Where arrangements are made under section 17, the placement request and placement plan templates should still be used by social workers.

6.2 Preparing parents

Preparations for the arrangements should be made as soon as possible, preferably following a pre-birth assessment. Parents should be made aware of the purpose of the arrangement.

- Where this is for a parenting assessment, parents should be told how long the assessment will take, who will undertake the assessment and how it will be carried out. Parents should also be made aware of what may happen once the assessment has been completed.
- Where the arrangement is for a looked after parent, the young person should be told how long the arrangement will go on for and what is expected of them in terms of balancing care for the child with their own education and training needs. The parent should also be informed about what service provision will be in place when they leave foster care, with services being planned through pathway planning processes.

Where possible, the parent should be able to visit the placement and meet the foster carer before the placement starts. Placements should be chosen as far in advance of the assessment beginning as possible.

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The foster carer should meet with the child's social worker and their supervising social worker prior to the placement starting to discuss the purpose of arrangements and their own role, as well as sharing relevant information about the parent.

6.3 Placement agreement meeting

A placement agreement meeting must be held at which agreements are made around the care of the child and any delegated authority and should be recorded and distributed to all those who attend. Such a meeting should be held even where the arrangement is voluntary under section 17.

The placement agreement meeting should ensure agreement is reached on the following:

- purpose and duration of the placement
- details on how any assessment will be carried out
- the foster carer's role in monitoring and assessing parental capacity (as appropriate)
- reporting and recording of information and progress
- frequency and purpose of placement visits by the child's social worker and supervising social worker
- contact arrangements and visitors
- levels of supervision to be offered by the foster carer
- any babysitting or other child care to be offered by the foster carer
- roles, responsibilities and expectations of the parent regarding care of the child
- circumstances in which the foster carer must intervene to protect the child
- house rules
- financial arrangements.

The placement agreement meeting should be used as an opportunity to draft the *Parent and child placement plan record* available on MOSAIC. The plan should be signed by all parties and will be the contract between CSSW, the foster carer and the parent. ***This record should be used even where the arrangements are made under section 17.***

6.4 Review of arrangements

Arrangements for the assessment of parenting capacity should be reviewed regularly in order to assess progress and facilitate decision-making. Frequency of reviews should be decided at the outset of the assessment. Agreement should be

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reached with the professional network as to how they will contribute to the review, ie: providing reports or attendance at a network meeting.

There should also be agreement on what level of engagement and progress parents need to demonstrate in order to continue with the assessment and/or move on to community-based support and the circumstances in which the assessment will end with separation.

If the child is looked after, the arrangements will also be subject to the CLA statutory review policy available at: <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/media/3220/statutory-CLA-reviews.pdf>

Arrangements for the support of a looked after parent will be subject to the CLA statutory review policy.

It is essential that the IRO ensures that the CLA review looks at the needs of the parent rather than solely focussing on the arrangements for the child's care. If both the parent and child are looked after, the IRO should consider whether or not it is in the interests of the parent and child to combine the review meetings or whether separate reviews should be held.

For all arrangements there should be a mechanism in place whereby reviews can be brought forward at the request of parents or the foster carer, particularly where there is a danger of arrangements breaking down.

6.5 Ending arrangements

Arrangements for the assessment of parenting capacity should have a planned ending that has been agreed in advance. It should be made clear how decisions on the assessment will be made, by whom, in what time-frame and who will communicate the outcome to the parent. This should be recorded in the placement plan in advance.

If the child is to remain in the parent's care, arrangements should be in place for a smooth transition to community-based support which should be recorded in a child in need plan.

If the child is not to remain in the parent's care, this situation must be carefully and sensitively handled. It should be clear who will take over the child's care once the assessment arrangement has ended and parents should be fully informed as to what action will be taken with regard to the child.

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Parents should also be made aware of what will happen should they leave the arrangement before the assessment has been finished.

Arrangements for the support of looked after parents will normally end when the young person moves on into semi-independent accommodation which will be planned via the pathway planning process. It is likely that the foster carer will remain involved and in touch with the young person to offer support during this transition.

Consideration should always be given to the young person and their child remaining with the foster carer in a Staying Put arrangement where this is requested by the young person and the carer.