

GWENT LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR FOSTER CARERS

Vision Statement

“Local authority fostering families in Gwent complete flexible learning and development opportunities delivered in a variety of ways to meet their personal and professional needs. They are able to reflect on experiences and apply learning in practice that will support them to provide high quality care to meets the needs of the children and young people they look after. “



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1. Introduction

This policy provides a clear learning and development pathway for local authority foster carers across Gwent. It aligns to the National Fostering Framework (NFF) Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for foster carers and should be read in conjunction with that document. https://www.afacymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/10-LD-Framework_E-1.pdf

Being a foster carer requires more than caring for a child. As part of a team there are expectations about meeting with professionals, contributing towards care planning and record keeping. We will provide the support, supervision, learning, development and training opportunities for you to feel confident in your role and to use your skills to really make a difference to the children and young people you care for.

Learning and development is crucial to the role of a foster carer. In Gwent our expectations are that foster carers commit to learning and development which will support you to look after and meet the needs of the children and young people in your care.

Pre-approval training

Pre-approval training for foster carers in Gwent is provided by attending a Fostering Preparation Course called The Skills to Foster.
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The course is designed to provide prospective foster carers with the knowledge and information that they need to gain a realistic picture of what's involved in caring for children looked after and is part of the assessment process. It will give you more of an understanding of why we need foster carers, who foster carers will be working with and how we plan for the children and young people we care for. The course follows key modules and it is necessary for all prospective foster carers to complete the course before they are approved (different arrangements may apply for family and friends foster carers.) Sometimes we may ask prospective foster carers to attend a neighbouring local authority's pre approval training in order to not to delay the process.

Information and discussion from the Skills to Foster sessions reveal the challenges and rewards of becoming a foster carer and provides applicants with an opportunity to reflect on how the role will impact on their lives as well as the lives of their family and friends.

Why have a post approval learning and development framework?

As part of this project, consultation was widely conducted with foster carers across Wales who were unanimous in their view that whilst pre-approval training was of a consistently high standard, opportunities for post-approval learning and development were mixed due to the variations in local training programmes.

Aims and objectives of the National Fostering Framework Post Approval Learning and Development Framework

- Our aim is to support you and your families to help care for and meet the needs of the children and young people you look after to ensure the best possible outcomes for children looked after.
- It provides a consistent approach to post-approval learning and development for foster carers in Wales and has clear and transparent standards.
- It creates a mechanism for collating and reviewing your learning and development achievements as well as the identification of your future needs via the personal learning record and development plan.
- It creates a clear pathway for you as carers to map your own professional development, whilst encouraging you to have a greater role in ownership of your own learning and development.
- It provides a resource for supervising social workers to discuss your learning and development needs via the personal learning record and development plan which is a working tool for supervision. This feeds into your annual review and learning, development and training needs analysis of the fostering service for the following year.

- To promote a range of learning and development opportunities with fewer requirements on refresher courses to allow you to have the time to explore new learning and development opportunities, specifically to support you and the children and young people you are caring for.
- It provides guidance on how the Learning and Development Framework and the Social Care Wales All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care Workers fit together
- The framework is very much based on learning outcomes – not tick box exercises. It recognises that there are a range of ways in which to learn and develop e.g. e-learning, self-guided study, support groups, classroom based etc. It is best practice and flexible yet provides a common approach to learning and development.
- Whatever the approach to learning, these activities should be clearly recorded and evidenced. The personal learning record and development plan needs to be a relevant working tool that feeds into your supervisions and annual reviews.
- The essential aim is that you can demonstrate through discussion with your supervising link worker how you have met the learning outcomes and how you are applying learning in practice

2. Our commitment to our foster carers

In line with The Fostering Network Foster Carers' Charter, *“we believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster”*

- We will facilitate the pre-approval The Skills to Foster © training at regular intervals throughout the year and invite applicants to attend.
- We will invite all newly approved carers to complete the All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care to support you in your new role. All foster carers will be supported and encouraged to undertake the AWIFHSC as part of your

progression prior to beginning other qualifications. Future opportunities for learning and development may include access to Level 3 Health and Social Care Practice (CYP) qualification. You can learn more information about the AWIFHSC in the NFF Learning and Development Framework or via Social Care Wales https://socialcare.wales/cms_assets/file-uploads/AWIFHSC-Intro-and-Guidance-JULY18.pdf

- We will provide opportunities to complete the core learning and development activities. We will ensure that the learning and development opportunities will be stimulating and will be evaluated against the clear outcomes in the learning and development framework.
- Whilst striving towards modern approaches to communication, we will ensure that information about learning and development opportunities is available for you in an accessible format.
- We will provide opportunities for you to attend new training and have fresh learning opportunities.
- We will listen to your ideas when discussing learning, development and training needs
- Opportunities will be accessible to all learners using formal, self-guided and blended learning opportunities. We will provide and recognise the value of different approaches to learning and development opportunities, for example e-learning, peer mentoring, self-study (including reading, podcasts, documentaries) and support groups.
- We will ensure that you have an individual personal learning record and development plan that is discussed regularly with you and reviewed annually.
- We will support you to develop the skills to be able to support and develop others.
- We will provide opportunities for your family and support networks to be included in learning, development and training
- We will provide opportunities for you to undertake training with other professionals

- Learning and development opportunities that are delivered by the local authority will take account of physical and emotional needs, language, geography, working patterns and childcare and will fit within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

3. Our expectations of our foster carers

“We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.” (The Fostering Network Foster Carers’ Charter).

Our expectations of our foster carers are:

- To attend the Skills to Foster © as necessary prior to being approved as part of the assessment process (different arrangements may apply for family and friends foster carers).
- To be responsible and proactive for your learning and development needs
- To complete core learning and development opportunities within 2 years of being approved as a foster carer.
- To have an on-going commitment to develop knowledge and skills throughout your fostering career.
- To take up opportunities offered to you, attend and contribute towards relevant training, learning and development.
- You will need to evidence a minimum of 15 hours learning and development a year. This will be discussed as part of your annual foster carer review.
- To let us know if you are unable to attend any training sessions at the earliest opportunity as there is a cost associated with this and often other foster carers may be on a waiting list to attend. For formal training courses full attendance is required to achieve the qualification therefore you will be required to make the necessary arrangements to achieve full attendance.

- To prioritise your learning needs and use supervision effectively to identify learning opportunities and to be able to evidence how you are applying/will apply new learning and development in practice.
- To use your Personal Learning Record and Development Plan and keep it up to date as this will be a working tool for discussion at supervision sessions/visits.
- To attend refresher courses as required.
- To use a mix of learning opportunities to develop your knowledge, skills and confidence
- To commit to attending regional training where there may be low demand locally, but it is necessary for your personal learning and development or to meet the specific needs of the children and young people in your care.
- To attend and contribute to groups and events that your fostering service provides. Meeting other foster carers is a valuable support to your role as a foster carer and gives you the opportunity to share and learn from each other.

4. The Learning Framework

The framework outlines core, additional and specific learning and development opportunities.

CORE:

The core learning, development and training opportunities apply to all foster carers and are an essential foundation. Our expectation is that all newly approved foster carers will complete core learning within 2 years following approval and that experienced carers also need to ensure completion of all the core learning, development and training opportunities

Your core learning and development will help you understand your role as a foster carer and caring for our children and young people who are looked after.

ADDITIONAL:

Following the completion of core training we expect foster carers to complete a minimum of 15 hours per year appropriate to the needs and with regards to the care and support plan of the children and young people in placement. It should also reflect your individual development plan which will outline your specific learning and development needs as identified at your annual review.

A range of additional learning and development opportunities are offered within flexible and diverse programmes to provide opportunities for you to further develop your knowledge, skills and expertise.

These learning and development opportunities build upon the core foundation and reflect the development needs of you as individual foster carers.

SPECIFIC:

We recognise that Foster Carers may require access to specific learning and development opportunities to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with you or your own personal development. These may be accessed at any time during your journey through the Post Approval Learning and Development Framework. The specific opportunities are vast and the list provided in the framework is not an exhaustive list, recognising that other opportunities outside of the framework may be required to meet specific needs.

Please refer to the Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for full details

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5. Refresher courses

Some of the training we offer is fundamental to the requirements to be approved as a foster carer and needs to be attended more than once to keep your knowledge and skills fresh. Where refresher courses are needed, we will use the opportunity to bring you up to date with changes in law, new ideas about practice and develop a deeper understanding of the subject.

Foster carers are required to attend refresher training on the following subjects every 3 years:

- Safeguarding/Child protection
- First Aid

6. Learning and development opportunities

We aim to give our foster carers the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills through a variety of ways which will suit your learning styles. We work hard to find courses that will provide new information and learning relevant to your role as a foster carer and offer you the chance to attend and learn not only from the course facilitators but also from each other and the valuable experiences you can share.

While formal training is one opportunity to evidence your learning we also recognise that there are other opportunities such as attendance at support groups, e-learning, podcasts, television and radio programmes, your own reading and research, or consultation with psychology.

You can use your personal learning record and development plan as creatively as you wish to keep a record of other forms of learning and development you have had and reflect with your supervisor how you use your learning on a day to day basis.

Formal training is provided by a variety of routes; it can be organised by the fostering team or our workforce development department. We may have facilitators from Childrens Services Teams or we may work in partnership with other organisations to provide the training.

All training courses have a cost whether it is the time of the people involved in organising or delivering the training or a commissioning fee when using other organisations.

We believe in our commitment to supporting our foster carers to develop their knowledge and skills to provide the best possible care for our children and young people who are looked after and do not charge for attendance at training courses. We do ask for a commitment from our foster carers to make every effort to attend training when they have been successful in securing a place on a course or to let us know in a timely manner if they cannot attend.

There are many different learning and development opportunities, which your supervising social worker will discuss with you. When applying for formal training it is your responsibility to put the course details in your diary when you receive a confirmation email.

There is an annual training calendar for foster carers to see what courses are available throughout the year. Ask your supervising social worker for a copy or go online and access the calendar through the fostering pages of your fostering services website, or contact the workforce development team.

7. How to use your Personal Learning Record and Development Plan

. https://www.afacymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/11-Personal-LRD-Plan_E.pdf

- You can record all of your learning in the personal learning record and development plan for you to refer to whenever you need to.
- This will enable you and your supervising social worker to see at a glance all the work you have completed.
- Keep your personal learning record and development plan and any certificates together.
- You can evidence the completion of your core learning and development for your first and second foster carer annual review.
- After completing a learning and development opportunity or attending a training course you will need to reflect with your supervising social worker on what you have learnt and how you can use this in your practice
- You can use your personal learning record and development plan to keep track of the dates you have completed the relevant training and when a refresher course is due to be attended.

- The National Fostering Framework Learning and Development Framework emphasises learning outcomes. There will be different ways to deliver and access learning opportunities, however learning, development and training activities should be clearly recorded and evidenced.
- The essential aim is that your learning and development is evidenced, not solely through certificates and attendance at training courses or support groups, completing e –learning or self-study but through discussion with your supervisor. You will need to demonstrate how you will/are applying your learning in practice and how this benefits the children and young people you care for.

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