

Introduction

Parent and child fostering is a specialist fostering arrangement in which a child and their mother and/or father live with approved foster carers in a formalised arrangement. According to the Department for Education (DfE) (2019), five per cent of approved foster carers in England at the time of publication were approved to provide parent and child foster care. The demand for parent and child fostering continues to grow (Fostering Network, 2017) and some independent services in England and Wales note that referrals for such arrangements constitute more than 10 per cent of their total referrals.

Although there have always been examples of parents being in foster homes with their children, these have tended to be *ad hoc* arrangements designed to allow teenage parents, often themselves looked after, to remain with their baby in a safe and supportive environment. The emphasis in these arrangements has largely been on supporting and helping these young mothers to become competent parents, rather than formally assessing the quality of parenting. While this is important, it constitutes a small part of the parent and child fostering that is currently taking place.

The growth of parent and child fostering in England and Wales has been in relation to parents – mainly adults – whose ability to safely care for their child in the community is in question, and where the family court is involved. These parents – most commonly mothers with young babies – would historically have been assessed within a residential care setting, allowing mother and baby to remain together in a safe environment while a specialist assessment of their parenting took place. However, changes to legal aid funding in England and Wales in October 2007 meant that costs relating to a residential assessment of a child could no longer be charged to the Legal Services Commission (England), leaving the local authority responsible for these costs. Taylor (2008) suggests that this resulted in a significant reduction in the making of residential placements.

This led to local authorities looking for a cheaper alternative, and in a context where even given significant child protection concerns, the courts were increasingly reluctant to separate parents from their babies. Justice Munby (2013) described the separation of a parent and child as a 'draconian and extremely harsh measure which demands extraordinarily compelling justification', and talked about the need for daily contact between a baby and mother, enough to allow her to breastfeed the child (Schofield and Simmonds, 2011).

The solution that was arrived at was to arrange for the parent and child to be placed together in a foster home, and with early anecdotal evidence about the success of this approach, it increasingly became the norm. In response to the demand, local authorities and independent fostering providers (IFPs) in England and Wales began to develop their parent and child fostering services, and pockets of expertise were established. Where previously parent and child fostering had been primarily offered to children who became mothers while in the care system, the new demand was for placements of adults with their children, usually in the context of care proceedings in England and Wales.

Anecdotal evidence shared by practitioners at a CoramBAAF-organised focus group in October 2019 suggests that across England, the demand for parent and child foster care continues to grow. While it is clear that there is some regional variation, the general trend is for local authorities to be seeking foster carers for increasingly complex families, often involving fathers as well as mothers, and with multiple children. Practitioners at the focus group suggested that drug and alcohol issues were commonly factors in the concerns about parents, as was domestic abuse. It was stated that at times courts were being unrealistic about what could be safely managed in the context of a foster home.

In Scotland, parent and child fostering is not commonplace, and where it exists, it tends to be about offering support to young mothers already in the care system. Practitioners report that in Northern Ireland, there have been informal parent and child fostering arrangements for some time, but that Trusts are now looking to develop their services in response to the growing demand for this type of service. This might mean developing specific parent and child schemes, or including parent and child fostering within other specialist fostering provision.

This 2020 edition of this Good Practice Guide includes updated material, although much of that which was contained in the 2011 edition has remained relevant. It also contains a suite of forms for use by practitioners, available within the appendices as follows:

- Appendix 1: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Fostering Assessment Report
- Appendix 2: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Referral Form
- Appendix 3: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Placement Agreement
- Appendix 4: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Foster Carer Record
- Appendix 5: CoramBAAF Parent and Child Foster Carer Progress Checklist
- Appendix 6: Fostering Hope: Information and resource hub for parent and child foster care

All of these forms and sample letters are also available as Word files for purchase; the set of forms costs £20. These can be purchased at:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/parent-child-fostering-forms>, or by contacting CoramBAAF Publications Sales at pubs.sales@corambaaf.org.uk or on 020 7520 7517.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Historically, social workers and others have tended to talk about “mother and baby” fostering, and many practitioners continue to use this term. We have preferred “parent and child” in recognition of the fact that increasing numbers of fathers are involved, and on occasions whole families, and also to recognise that not all of the children are babies.

We are mindful of arguments that the child should be named first as in “child and parent”, but have kept with the more recognised wording that emphasises the unique aspect of this arrangement – the involvement of a parent in a foster home.

Less easy is the question of whether we talk about parent and child “placements” or parent and child “arrangements”. The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 introduced a definition of parent and child arrangements as ‘arrangements made by a local authority for a parent and their child to live with a foster parent, whether or not the parent or the child is placed with the foster parent’. In other words, the new term “parent and child arrangement” was introduced in recognition that these arrangements might be placements (a term with a specific legal meaning in England¹), or they might not.

After much consideration, we have decided to use the term “arrangements” in the practice guidance, although it is worth acknowledging that this is not without difficulties. Firstly, it is an England-specific term, and may not be recognised in other countries within the UK. For this we apologise, but have found ourselves caught between wanting to make this guidance relevant to all countries in the UK, and at the same time not wanting to use terminology that is technically incorrect in England, and that fails to convey the legal basis under which parents and children are living with people who are approved as foster carers.

The second difficulty is that “arrangements” is not a term that is routinely used by practitioners, even in England, even though it is enshrined in legislation. It will take some time for practitioners to

1 “Placement” is defined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 as ‘(i) arrangements made by the responsible authority for C to live with P in accordance with section 22C(2), where C is in the care of the responsible authority, or (ii) arrangements made by the responsible authority to provide for C’s accommodation and maintenance by any means specified in section 22C(6).’

adjust to this new term and will mean that recognised terms like “pre-placement” and “post-placement” are replaced with “pre-arrangement” and “post-arrangement”.

These phrases will likely feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable for some time.

We have used the definitions set out in the England Regulations 2011 when describing the different fostering services, so the generic term “fostering services” is used to cover both local authority fostering services and independent fostering providers.