

## **Participation and Consultation**

### **Scope of this policy**

This policy explains how the agency consults with children and young people to ensure that their wishes, feelings and views are heard and acted upon.

### **Underpinning fostering regulations and standards**

**Regulation 11** – duty to secure welfare

**Regulation 18** – representation and complaints

**NMS 1:** The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

### **Outcome:**

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all circumstances; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of others with an important relationship with the child are gathered and taken into account.

### **Related policies**

Compliments Complaints & Representations Procedure

Complaints Procedure for Children and Young People

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### **1. Introduction**

Everyone involved in the receipt and delivery of services should be consulted about decisions which may affect them. This includes children, their parents, other significant family members, and those charged with providing the service, including managers, staff, foster parents and professionals or colleagues from other agencies.

This means that people's views should be sought and considered in relation to all decisions that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Consultation should take place on a regular and frequent basis with those who need to be consulted, and assumptions should not be made about the inability or lack of interest of those who are invited to share their views.

### **2. Children and Young People's Participation**

#### **Principles**

Children and young people's participation in decisions about their lives is an essential part of growing up and, if done well, it enhances children's safety and wellbeing and improves services designed to support and protect them. To be done well, it requires a commitment at all levels of the organisation to reflect on and promote:

- Positive attitudes towards children and young people
- Communication skills
- Appropriate resources
- Commitment to developing services which support children's participation

We recognise that the quality of care that young people receive will affect their life chances more than anything else, and that our services will be enhanced by listening attentively to the information provided by young people.

We also believe that the young people placed in our care will be more knowledgeable about what happens within the caring environment than many of

those who look after them. Prior to coming into our care, many will have experienced a variety of different caring environments and styles of parenting. It is therefore very important that we communicate with them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses very clearly that children have a right to have their views heard on decisions that affect their lives. To this end, through our quality assurance systems, ISP will endeavour to take children's views seriously.

### **Procedures**

Subject to age and understanding, children will receive a Children's Guide when they come to live with our foster families, that welcomes them to the agency and provides age-appropriate information about foster care. We have different guides for children of different ages and abilities and can create bespoke guides for children with learning or communication disabilities. We can also help young people who do not speak English to view the guide's contents in a different language, using Google Translate technology and our I-SPACE website.

We will help young people to understand why they have come to live with a foster family and be supported to be involved in their Care Plans. We will help them to understand their rights, to make choices and to consider all options available to them. We will also let them know how they can tell us about problems or make a complaint.

Throughout a child or young person's time with us, their foster parents work as a team with ISP and other professionals and contribute to the care planning process for the child. The child's views are sought about their progress and the care they are receiving, and prior to each statutory review of the Care Plan, we encourage young people to contribute to reports that are prepared about their progress.

Consultation takes place on a regular and frequent basis, using a variety of methods to encourage children and young people to take part. Children will be seen alone at least four times a year, and the family's supervising social worker will complete at least one of these visits. We also invite children and young people to a range of activities and events which provide an opportunity to gain views in a more relaxed environment. We send children surveys to gather their views on a periodic basis, and in relation to specific issues. Where young people have communication difficulties of any sort, suitable and creative means are provided to enable them to be consulted. This includes access to advocates or representatives who may speak on their behalf. We have developed accessible feedback forms for children and young people with learning and/or communication disabilities.

We will ensure that children have access on a confidential basis to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly about problems and concerns, at a level which is appropriate for their age and understanding. Children are informed of their rights to advocacy and of how to access an advocate or contact the Children's Commissioner. This information is provided within the agency's Children's Guides.

If action following consultation is not possible, or is restricted for whatever reason, we will ensure that children and young people are informed of the decisions as soon as practicable thereafter. We will always give an explanation, and give the young person involved an opportunity to make a comment and express their views in return. We will always communicate with our children and young people using accessible language and with reference to 'Language that Cares' guidelines.

If decisions are made against young people's wishes, we will inform them of the decision and explain why the decision has been made. In these circumstances, we will let the young person know if they have any right to formally challenge the decision, for example by way of the agency's complaints procedure.

Our Fostering Panels routinely ask children's questions to applicants to foster, and we may ask children and young people to take part in recruitment activities for new staff members.

### **3. The role of the Manager**

Managers must ensure that staff and carers have the time and resources available to ensure the effective participation of children and young people, and facilitate the process by:

- Using supervision to consider issues relating to the voice of the child and ongoing cases.
- Reviewing complaints or concerns raised by children and young people and what actions have been taken to address these.
- Reviewing compliments to build on these.
- Considering children and young people's representations in relation to issues such as gender, culture, sexuality and disability.
- Ensuring procedures designed to gather issues raised by stakeholders including children and young people are in place and are routinely being used, reviewed and assessed for their impact.

- Ensuring children are seen alone at least four times a year, so that they can share their views, wishes and feelings. The supervising social worker should complete at least one of these visits.
- Ensuring procedures are in place to provide feedback to stakeholders, including children and young people, e.g. letting them know what changes have been made and if not, the reason for this.

It is assumed that people working in the organisation will take reasonable steps to keep their managers informed of their actions and will consult and seek their approval where they do not have decision-making responsibility delegated to them.

In order to facilitate this, managers must ensure that effective lines of communication are established and maintained.

#### **4. Consultation with Stakeholders**

In addition to the views of the child, the agency will gather similar information from "significant others" in the child's life, social workers and commissioning bodies.