

Short Breaks Policy and Procedures

This document explains the agency’s provision of short breaks for foster parents, and procedures to be followed.

The term ‘respite’ is often used by social care professionals to refer to the provision of short breaks that support foster parents to rest and take time away from the demands of the fostering task. However, the term ‘respite’ can have negative connotations for children and young people, and we actively explore alternative terminology as part of our *Language that Cares* approach and will be using the term ‘short breaks’ within the agency.

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Introduction

ISP recognises that the fostering task can have a significant impact on all members of the household, and we acknowledge the need for adults and children to be able to access short breaks throughout the year. This is important for maintaining our foster parents’ wellbeing and a healthy home environment for the children and young people. The overall aim of these breaks is to support placement stability.

There will also be some occasions when the foster child and foster family will need unplanned time apart due to circumstances that require an emergency break to be arranged.

ISP is committed to providing up to 22 nights' break from fostering each year for our families as a way of ensuring that foster parents and their families have a chance throughout the year to rest and have adult and family time together.

The Child's View

Some children enjoy a change of environment and view this time away from their foster family as a 'holiday', with a welcome change from the usual day-to-day household routine. For other children, however, it can provoke feelings of uncertainty and anxiety and change can be disorientating. It is important that short breaks are well planned and that, wherever possible, children's wishes are respected. Arrangements must reflect a child-centred approach, and breaks will not ordinarily be agreed if they coincide with children's birthdays or other significant dates such as religious festivals. Breaks within school term time can only be approved where arrangements can be made to support the child's school routine.

We aim to provide continuity of care during short breaks, so that the child can develop a relationship with the other family and enjoy their time away from home. Some children prefer to remain in the foster home, and this can be achieved if there is a family member who can move in while the foster parent is away. Alternatively, children may go to stay with members of their foster parent's extended family, or close family friends with whom they are familiar. These families can become 'accredited' with ISP to provide care for the children of specific foster families while they take a break.

When a child is due to stay with an unfamiliar family, it is important that introductory visits take place. Children need to feel accepted and welcomed and they will need clear information about what to expect in the new home environment and how long they will be staying for. To ensure the success of all short breaks, clear agreements must be reached between the foster parents and the short break family as to each child's needs and routines.

Although it may not always be possible, some children will benefit from continued contact with their foster family during the break, for example a telephone or video call to reassure them that they are held in mind while they are apart.

Outline of Provision

- Families can choose to take short breaks up to a total of 22 nights each year. The calendar year runs from 1 April to 31 March and provision is pro rata. This means that the allowance is accrued during the weeks when children are in placement. Foster parents can find out their allowance at any time from their local centre.

- Should additional breaks be required in exceptional circumstances (e.g. emergencies or to support placement stability), this must be agreed with the Registered/Centre Manager.
- Foster parents taking a short break will be paid their usual 'foster parent fee' but not the 'child allowance' element of their usual full weekly fee. Current rates can be seen in the Foster Parent Finance Handbook.
- The short break family will receive the full weekly fostering fee, including the 'child allowance'.
- Short breaks will not usually be agreed within two months of a child coming into placement.
- Breaks will not ordinarily be agreed if they coincide with children's birthdays or other significant dates such as religious festivals.
- Breaks requested during school term time can only be approved if arrangements support the child's school routine.
- A short break will not normally exceed two consecutive weeks.
- Short break placements will ordinarily be with approved ISP foster parents or short-break-only families. In exceptional circumstances, arrangements may be made with foster families from another agency within the Polaris Community or the child's local authority may agree specific alternative arrangements which must be discussed and arranged via the centre.
- There is no provision for payment if breaks are not taken during the calendar year, nor the 'carrying over' of untaken breaks.

Arrangements for Breaks

- Written permission from the children's local authority social workers must be sought by ISP and agreement given if placing alongside other children.

- At least one month's notice is required when requesting a short break, unless it is in response to an emergency.
- Foster parents should not book a holiday before the request for a break has been accepted.
- The foster parent should discuss their request with their fostering advisor. They should then complete a '*Short Break Request and Matching Form*' in detail and return this to the fostering adviser. This will be shared with the identified short break foster family.
- The short break foster parent will discuss the referral with their own fostering adviser.
- Foster parents and short break families should liaise over transport of the child between homes. ISP does not provide transport for these arrangements. If the arrangement is for the foster parent to take the child to school and the short break family to collect the child from school, the short break family will become responsible for the child's care at the start of the school day and will need to be available to respond to any incidents that arise during the school day.
- Where possible, all requests for a break will be organised within the child's own centre, by fostering advisers and SSWs in consultation with the Registered/Centre Manager and local authority social workers.
- The child's views regarding short breaks **must be sought and considered** when making decisions about who should care for them whilst the foster parent takes a break. The child's view should be clearly recorded on the '*Short Break Request and Matching Form*'.