

**Achieving for Children IFA**

# **Fostering Mentoring Scheme**

**Carers and the AfC IFA fostering service use only**



**achieving  
for children**

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Definition .....	1
Aim and objective .....	1
Benefits and Intended outcomes.....	2
Role description .....	2
Eligibility criteria .....	4
Expectations of support .....	5
Length of formal support .....	5
Financial offer .....	6
Process.....	6
Record keeping .....	7
Confidentiality, information sharing and safeguarding .....	8
Conflict resolution .....	8
Appendix.....	10

<b>Date created</b>	March 2021
<b>Version and sign off</b>	V1. agreed by IFA Board (April 2021)
<b>Review date</b>	June 2022
<b>Author</b>	Natalie Bugeja, Head of Fostering Services

## **Introduction**

The idea and vision for mentoring in fostering has long been requested by Achieving for Children (AfC) foster carers and supervising social workers. We hope that the scheme will give new carers an additional support through their early stages of approval via someone who comes to with their own experiences of being in their shoes, similar to carers who may receive support while going through an identified adversity. We want to acknowledge that while we hope this offer will be flexible in nature, flexible in the approach, need and practicality.

We realise that this document which outlines the arrangement offer could feel bureaucratic and strongly procedural. We need to have some perimeters, some guidance of what is expected so that while the offer might be individual to the person, it still offers an overarching service.

It is hoped that this scheme will give carers an additional helping hand and support their involvement in fostering, while also further developing the great strengths of some of our most experienced carers. We envisage this, in line with all other supports offered to carers such as support groups, informal coffee catch ups and foster carer conferences (to name a few), will encourage the growth of all our skills, confidence and knowledge.

## **Definition**

The AfC fostering mentoring scheme is a one-to-one support offer for approved foster carers. The scheme provides structured one-to-one assistance through a developing relationship with other approved foster carers. The support would be between a more experienced carer and newly approved or less-experienced carer. Mentors offer support from a position of understanding as foster carers themselves.

## **Aim and objective**

To offer one-to-one support through shared experience within the AfC IFA fostering agency in providing varied support to approved foster carers.

- To support newly approved and less experienced carers.
- To provide support through difficulty with someone who has shared experiences.
- Personal development for experienced foster carers.
- Improve placement stability.
- Strengthen retention of foster carers.

## **Benefits and Intended outcomes**

### **For mentors**

- Personal development plan
- Recognition of years of fostering experience
- Wider experience in providing support to other approved carers
- Developing skills and enhanced status
- Payment and/or reward for service

### **For mentee**

- Assistance in adapting to fostering role
- Assistance in navigating the organisation and regulations
- Support from fellow experienced carers
- Not feeling isolated through the change
- Gain a better understanding of the role of foster carers
- Receive trusted advice and guidance

## **Role description**

### **Mentor**

- Providing one-to-one support to newly approved foster carers, or to other foster carers when placements become challenging, for a planned period of six months and involving monthly face-to-face contact, phone, meeting and virtual contact.
- Maintaining contact with the foster carer mentee at the agreed times and dates.
- Providing telephone and email support to mentored foster carers.
- Helping foster carer mentees to identify appropriate goals and tasks and to work towards achieving these.
- Attending regular training sessions for mentors (minimum one a year) combined with opportunities to network.
- Attending mentoring supervision sessions for four to six weeks with the supervising social worker (SSW) when they are currently mentoring. The arrangement for this will be agreed and can be flexible with the SSW.\*
- Complying with fostering service policies and procedures, and in particular the confidentiality and recording policies relating to the mentoring scheme.
- Completing monthly timesheets and expenses claim forms.
- Participating actively in evaluation of the mentoring scheme.

\*Mentoring supervision will be a space for the mentor to explore any difficulties or challenges, to consider approaches, allow for reflection and ensure space is given for this discussion without impacting the regular required supervision sessions for all foster carers to explore their needs as a carer and situations arising from their placements. Arrangements for this can be agreed with the supervisor to work with the need at the time.

In addition to highly developed skills as a foster carer working with children, an effective mentor also needs to have or acquire sufficient skills and competencies in the following areas, helping adults to:

- establish and maintain rapport
- active listening and communication
- gain an ability to give and receive information
- maintain a non-judgemental approach
- encourage others, helping them to explore their own strengths
- help people to explore their needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes
- motivate people to develop new ideas, solutions, and strategies to achieve their goals
- take a non-directive approach
- understand of and respect for confidentiality
- acquire effective time management
- understand their own area of personal competence and ability to work within that

## **Mentee**

- To be open to the support offered.
- To be flexible and available for support sessions.
- Comply with fostering service policies and procedures, and in particular the confidentiality and recording policies relating to the mentoring scheme.
- Participate actively in evaluation of the mentoring scheme.
- Active listening and communication
- Gain an ability to give and receive information.

## **Supervising social worker**

- Identify carer for the mentoring scheme - mentors and mentees.
- Consider matching and follow processes outlined.
- Organise initial introduction meeting.
- Follow up about the process.
- Provide feedback to support plan meetings.

- SSWs for mentors, to arrange separate supervision sessions to focus on current mentoring.
- Support booking carers in for additional training as discussed and agreed.
- Comply with fostering service policies and procedures, and in particular the confidentiality and recording policies relating to the mentoring scheme.
- Participate actively in evaluation of the mentoring scheme.
- Mediate if there is a conflict between mentor and mentee.

## **Eligibility criteria**

### **Newly approved carer**

Newly approved foster carer with Achieving for Children offering mainstream fostering care.

### **Mentoring through adversity**

Throughout a person's fostering career they may experience challenges within the placement that would benefit from mentoring support. This would be explored as part of a placement stability support plan, through a complexity assessment support plan and or an annual review. The foster carer may be linked again with a mentor, if they have previously worked with one, alternatively another carer who has had similar experiences might be considered better suited. This will be explored within the Fostering Team and offered as such. This offer again will be time limited, but reviewed regularly within the support plan process.

Similar to the process of matching a mentor with a newly approved carer, the supervising social worker with support from their supervisor will consider this and discuss appropriately with the relevant supervising social worker and mentor carer.

### **Mentor**

- Level 2 to 3 carer, with considerable years of fostering experience with a variety of placement situations, mentoring experience, etc.
- Have attended all mandatory training within agreed timescales.
- Have had an active placement history whereby they have relevant skills to exchange relating to practical issues around child care, awareness of resources available, an understanding of the structures of children's services and their organisational processes, policies and procedures.
- Have time available for face-to-face meetings, be contactable by telephone or email for supplementary support, and to provide written notes from the key meetings.
- Have demonstrated an ability to work within departmental procedures and processes and be willing to adhere to the mentoring policy and procedures.
- Be able to commit to the scheme for the duration of a mentoring link.

## **Expectations of support**

The relationship between mentor and mentee is likely to be most successful if the mentee understands what to expect and feels confident in the mentor, while the mentor needs to be protected from unrealistic expectations being placed on them.

A written agreement between the mentor and mentee can cover aspects such as:

- purpose of the relationship
- specific skills and knowledge identified as development goals for the mentee
- ground rules, including behaviour and personal responsibility
- method and frequency of contact
- role of others, such as the mentoring scheme co-ordinator
- boundaries
- recording
- confidentiality
- problem resolution

Ideally, the mentoring agreement can be completed at the initial introduction meeting with the supervising social workers. The agreement can be reviewed during the mentoring period.

## **Length of formal support**

### **Newly approved carers**

The AfC fostering scheme will be offered to newly approved carers for up to their first six months of approval unless commencement of the mentoring support timescale is agreed differently (this can be for a variety reasons). This arrangement will be reviewed throughout this period, with the possibility of a reasonable extension where vital to the situation.

### **Adversity instability (support plan agreement)**

The AfC fostering scheme will be offered through a support plan and will be offered for up to three months. This arrangement will be reviewed throughout this period along with the support plan.

## Financial offer

Mentor households will be paid £50 a month (average four weeks) for support and additional costs associated with being a mentor once you have an active mentee matched. This will be paid as £150 for three months' support, and if the support continues for the further three months then the further payment of £150 will be paid. With a maximum £300 paid for a six month mentor support arrangement and £150 paid for a three month mentor support arrangement. Any changes to the payment process would need to be agreed with the branch manager or head of fostering.

## Process

Towards the end of a carers initial approval process the social worker will start considering a match for mentor within the service. This will be discussed with their supervisor and other SSWs whose carers might be considered for the role.

When considering the matching for the one-to-one mentoring, matching needs to be considered between mentor and mentee. This matching consideration will take into account a number of factors. The key priority will be matching carers with carers of similar approval type or similar experiences. This could be related to their fostering placements, the household dynamics for the carers, and/or special interests and areas of expertise such as disability or SEN. Additionally, we may take into account the following depending on the situation and need: language needs, race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality or geographical location.

Once a mentor is approached and agrees to the role, there will be an introduction session with the mentee, mentor and the supervising social workers. This meeting will explore:

- confidentiality, information sharing and safeguarding
- needs and desired outcomes
- meeting times, types and recording
- appropriate contact
- mentoring scheme policy
- the process for feeding back information and concerns to SSWs
- completion of the mentoring agreement

The support might be reviewed during this period to ensure it is still meeting the needs required to continue.

Recording keeping supports a log of progress and identified supports and challenges. This document is written up by the mentor and shared with the mentee for agreement, timescales and arrangements will be agreed in the initial meeting. It can be a brief summary of discussion and actions. This can also be shared with the supervising social worker of the mentee so that the social worker can also support in achieving these goals and actions, and



the mentor's supervising social worker, as a means to consider how the mentor can support these actions.

On nearing the completion of the formal support, there will be a reflection of this support, feedback and further thinking for the mentee. Additionally, the mentor will receive a supervision session to close off the specific role and discuss any training or needs that have come from supporting.

There is no reason that a mentor and mentee cannot continue an informal supportive relationship as foster carers, after the conclusion of the formal arrangement. This would be agreed between the mentor and mentee.

## **Mentoring through adversity**

Throughout a person's fostering career, they may experience challenges within the placement that would benefit from mentoring support. This would be explored as part of a placement stability support plan, through complexity assessment support plan and or an annual review. The foster carer may be linked again with their mentor if they have previously worked, alternatively it might be considered another carer who has had similar experiences will be better suited. This will be explored within the Fostering Team and offered as such. This offer again will be time limited, but reviewed regularly within the support plan process.

Similar to the process of matching a mentor with a newly approved carer, the supervising social worker, with support from their supervisor, will consider this and discuss appropriately with the relevant supervising social worker and mentor carer.

## **Record keeping**

The mentoring scheme places minimal expectations regarding records of contact between mentor and mentee as it is believed that an informal approach is reinforced without written records and this distances the activity from the bureaucracy of social work services. We recommend, however, that mentors use the following minimum methods of recording.

- A written contract or agreement between mentor and mentee that clarifies basic expectations. (See appendix)
- A mentoring record sheet that allows mentor and mentee to note and recall any agreed actions and key discussions. (See appendix)

The main purpose of keeping a record of sessions and other contact between mentor and mentee is to help both parties to summarise what has been discussed (further details are above in the process section of this document). We recommend that this record is done at least once a month if not more, as per agreement and/or need.

## **Confidentiality, information sharing and safeguarding**

It is acknowledged that a mentoring relationship requires trust and an understanding around the issues of confidentiality between mentor and mentee. The mentee needs to feel confident that they can explore their true thoughts and feelings and that the mentor is sensitive to them and can respect boundaries.

It would be made clear to the mentor from the start of the relationship that they have a specific role with the mentee, covering areas such as understanding and adapting to fostering and the way the fostering service is run, encouraging involvement in the fostering community (for example attending support groups or training) and developing new ideas, skills and knowledge. They are not there as a substitute for access to the mentee's supervising social worker. At no time should a mentor feel as though they are being burdened with issues from the mentee beyond their abilities and role.

Information about a child or young person should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis. However, it is accepted that to properly provide support the mentor will need to know some background information about the child the mentee is fostering, and any particular issues that the mentee is finding difficult to manage.

Personal identifiable information about a child or young person in their care should only be shared if necessary for the mentor to provide appropriate support and advice to the mentee. Being looked after often means that children know that they are being talked about in many different circles, which can be alienating and isolating. Foster carers and social workers have a responsibility to ensure that children's information is only shared where it is necessary to protect them from harm or to promote their welfare.

It is important to note that if in any situation there were worries or identified safeguarding concerns, the mentor would need to provide them to their supervising social worker or fostering manager. This will be discussed further in the initial meeting.

## **Conflict resolution**

The mentoring agreement should include a process whereby disagreement or antipathy between mentor and mentee can be addressed if they cannot resolve it themselves. This might involve participation in a meeting with one or more SSWs. It is expected that the mentor and the mentee would try to resolve the conflict among themselves in the first instance.

It is also possible that either party may perceive a conflict of interest at some stage and this too should be subject to a resolution process. In either circumstance, it is possible that the parties may agree to bring the link to an end, in which case the scheme co-ordinator should consider whether there are any issues to be followed up and whether another mentor should be allocated. In all cases where there is disagreement or conflict, it is important that this is recorded.

If a mentoring relationship is not working because of a clash of personalities or approaches to problem solving, this does not mean that anyone has failed or let anyone else down. The co-ordinator should try to help the participants, perhaps through a three-way meeting, to identify the ways in which they clash and whether either can alter their approach or style, but ultimately it is best to end the relationship rather than have it 'limp on' in an unsatisfactory way.

## **Appendix**

### **Agreement template**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NIsa8XHvZH\\_buTFGt3lxy74h4xt7b0N4EGxu1xAViJY/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NIsa8XHvZH_buTFGt3lxy74h4xt7b0N4EGxu1xAViJY/edit#)

### **Agreement review template**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iio2AawMmYK\\_UxVmcPF-L9KJ0Ldsxmflg4Mfj0krKc/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iio2AawMmYK_UxVmcPF-L9KJ0Ldsxmflg4Mfj0krKc/edit#)

### **Mentor recording template**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/12IHd8ge2IN-8ZtujIGAHyCYIIAWx7uZemLDhhUYjsEI/edit#>