



Distance Learning Programme

For friends and relatives of By the Bridge with Cambian foster families

The Distance Learning Programme is designed for approved By the Bridge with Cambian foster parents to use when preparing members of their network to provide emergency, day or respite care for their foster children.

The programme is also a useful tool for raising awareness of fostering issues with friends and family members who will not be providing care for foster children but may come into regular contact with them in the course of their social lives.

Friends and family members are often an ideal choice for providing planned or emergency care, they are people who the child will be familiar with and who the foster parents will know well and have confidence in.

Foster parents will already know that fostering a child is very different from being a legal parent or guardian of a child. Foster parents must ensure that people providing periods of care for their foster child are aware that fostering is practiced within a legal framework and that most major decisions require the consideration of other professionals working with the child. It is also the responsibility of the foster parent to ensure that the alternative foster parents have essential information on the child, e.g. full name, date of birth, responsible authority details, health care information e.g. known allergies or current medication, identified risks, school contact details, By the Bridge with Cambian contact details, familiar routine, expectations etc.

If they require any information, guidance or advice when caring for a By the Bridge with Cambian foster child, members of the foster family network should contact By the Bridge with Cambian IMMEDIATELY, either on the office number 0845 450 9944 from 9am to 5pm or the emergency number 07967 738924 from 5pm to 9am weekdays or 24 hours during weekends and public holidays.

Safe Care

Every family has different rules, expectations and lifestyles. Children who cannot live with their own families may have experienced chaotic, unpredictable parenting. Some children in foster care have been neglected or abused. Negative experiences during their early years can cause children and young people to behave in ways that may not be expected for their age – abuse and neglect cause lasting damage to a child's ability to develop in a healthy way; a skilled foster family will teach the children in their care how to behave in more acceptable ways but this style of 're-parenting' takes time and perseverance. By understanding a little bit about fostering, friends and family members of By the Bridge with Cambian, foster parents can help a child to have a positive experience of being away from their foster family for short periods of time.

At its most basic level, foster care is about child protection. A foster home must be safe and foster parents must thoroughly consider ways of making the care they provide as safe as possible for every member of the main household and any other household the child may go to for care if it is not the home of an approved By the Bridge with Cambian foster parent.

The term often used to describe these considerations is 'Safe Care'.

'Safe Caring' can be simply defined as

- Keeping the foster child safe from all forms of abuse
- Keeping every child in the home safe from being harmed by other children
- Keeping all members of the household safe from false allegations of abuse

A small percentage of children are harmed in foster homes, and all forms of abuse have been reported (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect). All allegations of abuse will be investigated with three possible outcomes:

- **Proven:** an allegation which is supported by facts and found to be true
- **False:** an allegation which evidence shows to be untrue
- **Unsubstantiated:** an allegation which cannot be proven true or false

Why a foster child might be abused:

- Foster parents' behaviour, or the behaviour of people in their network may discriminate against the foster child (physical/emotional abuse)
- Foster parents or members of their network may become unable to cope due to their own problems (physical/emotional abuse/neglect)
- Foster parents or members of their network may lose their temper (physical/emotional abuse)
- Children who have been abused may behave in ways that appear to 'invite' abuse, because they may 'expect' to be abused again. Members of the foster family and their network must be sure they do not get drawn in and repeat past patterns (sexual/physical/emotional abuse)
- Strong feelings may be aroused by caring for children who have been sexually abused. Some people (including foster parent's own children) may not be able to control these feelings and may react in an abusive way (sexual abuse)
- Foster parents or members of their network may react inappropriately if their own children are affected by caring for children who have been sexually abused (physical abuse)

Why a child might make a false allegation of abuse:

- An innocent action or statement may be misinterpreted
- As a way of drawing attention to previous abuse for the first time
- As a way for a young person to exercise control over their life
- To try to end a foster placement without losing face

An allegation of abuse can happen to anyone, but providing a 'safe care' environment can be made much easier by implementing certain sensible household rules which every member must follow. If the safe care rules become second nature for you and your children, the risk of false allegations can be significantly reduced. It is important that those caring for foster children are not on constant alert for something to go wrong as this is unfair to the child, however, being prepared to make a few changes can make everyone more confident.

Risky Business exercise

Purpose: To identify some of the practical things a family can do in order to avoid situations which may be misinterpreted and lead to abuse, or allegations of abuse.

- by developing a clear set of 'home rules', family members will be able to identify risky behaviour, and avoid situations that pose a risk to foster children or themselves.
- by establishing 'home rules' risk can be reduced; 'safe care' does not mean removing love and affection from family life, foster children still need to be nurtured.

Note: that experienced foster parents say that they have had to change the way they do things at home, but after a while this just becomes second nature.

Complete the 'Risky Business' question sheet attached

Tick the box with the first response that comes into your head.

What did you think was too risky?

At By the Bridge with Cambian we think that numbers 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12, are not acceptable in a household where a foster child is being cared for as they create situations where a child or adult could feel at risk or actually be at risk of abuse or false accusation.

Numbers 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 are all situations that could potentially be risky but they tend to be part of family life. Can you think of any ways you could make these situations safer in your home? Please write them below:

These ideas could form some of your 'Home Rules' which could be the rules your family lives by when you are caring for a foster child. Common examples of Home Rules most foster families in By the Bridge with Cambian have are:

- Children must not play in bedrooms
- Get dressed before leaving bedroom or bathroom

Risky Business

	Safe	Risky
1. Children sometimes get into foster parents bed for a cuddle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. A male foster parent bathes a four-year-old boy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. A foster parent reads a bedtime story to a three-year old child in the child's bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Adults and children walk about unclothed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Foster parents play wrestling and tickling games with foster children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. A foster parent wipes the bottom of a severely disabled thirteen-year-old.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Children go into each other's bedrooms whenever they want to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. A foster parent is alone in a car with a foster child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. A seventeen-year-old occasionally looks after foster children alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Foster parent sleeps with an eleven-year-old foster child who is sick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. A foster parent photographs a six-year-old in the bath	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Foster family with two different gender birth children and 2 different gender foster children, book a holiday in a two bedroom caravan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Can you think of any aspects of your lifestyle, not listed above, that you may have to stop or adapt when you have a foster child staying in your home?

Risky Business

Children's Version

		Safe	Risky
1.	Children go into each other's bedrooms whenever they want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Children run around with no clothes on	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Children get into each other's beds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Children can borrow each other's toys or belongings without asking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	People do not lock the bathroom door	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	People leave money and valuable possessions lying around	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	People make fun of children because they are in foster care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Children keep secrets from adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Children dare each other to do dangerous things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Secrets

Some secrets are good to keep e.g. a surprise party is being planned for an adult's 50th birthday or a child is going to be given a new bike as a Christmas present.

What might happen if this kind of secret is not kept?

Some secrets are not good to keep e.g. another child or young person might tell you that they are being abused or that they are doing something that is dangerous.

What might happen if you do not tell a responsible adult this kind of secret?

Bubbles exercise

You will need the 'Bubbles' worksheet for this exercise.

The worksheet requires you to think very hard about your identity – the people, places, activities and events that are the most important features of your life and what make you who you are.

Give yourself 5 minutes on your own in a quiet space, don't talk to anyone else about your 'bubbles' – it's important that they come from inside you, no-one else needs to see what you have written.

Fill in each of the speech bubble, the headings will give you an idea of what sort of information is required, don't leave any blank.

Once your sheet is complete imagine that a very important, powerful person has entered your life, this person is going to make some big decisions about you and your future, there is nothing you can do about this, whatever this person decides is what has to happen and you have to co-operate as follows:

- You must cross out one of your bubbles, you can choose which one. By crossing it out you are accepting that whatever you have written about will be gone from your life.
- You must now cross out your 'Pleasure' bubble (for children the 'Good Times' bubble) you will have to do without these things in the new life being planned for you.
- If you have blue or green eyes you must choose another bubble to cross out. This is discrimination, but there's nothing you can do about it.
- You must now cross out your 'History' bubble (for children the 'Home' bubble) these things will now be gone from your life.

Look at your sheet and think about how different your life would be if this exercise were real. What are the things you have had taken away from you? How does it feel to think that they could be gone? What do you miss most of all? Would you be the same person if you had to face life without these things? If not, how do you think you would change? What kind of people would you need around you to help you cope with losing your important things? How hard would it be to get some new important things in your life? How long might it take?

Of course this is just an exercise and you haven't really had to lose any of the things you written about on your sheet, but this is not the case for children coming into foster care.

Children in foster care usually have to move away from their own area, they have to leave their parents, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Many children have to leave everything they own, including clothes and toys, behind.

Moving to a different area usually means that they have to change schools, leaving their friends behind. It also means that they won't be able to continue going to any clubs, groups or teams they belong to.

They have to leave their home, pets and neighbourhood; there is nothing they can do about these decisions.

Most children in foster care continue to see their parents and siblings, maybe for one hour a week or maybe only a couple of times a year. Many children lose contact with relatives outside their immediate family.

Good foster families will do everything they can to make their foster child feel welcome and safe, they will have a nice bedroom ready for the child to settle into, they will find new schools and clubs for the child to belong to, they will buy new clothes and toys and help the child to make new friends.

However good the foster family is they can never replace all the things, people and places the child has had to leave behind.

Children who have had to leave their home have left everything that makes them who they are; it is not surprising that these children are usually confused, angry and very upset, sometimes behaving in uncontrolled, challenging ways.

Foster families need their network of trusted family and friends around them, its part of what keeps them in shape for meeting the challenges of fostering. The network is not just for helping out with childcare now and then, it's also often the foster family's social life – they need to know that their friends and relatives understand the work they are doing and that they won't lose close friendships or social invitations because they are caring for a child with challenging behaviour.

We also recognise that the birth and adopted children of our foster parents play a vital role in welcoming, guiding and forming positive relationships with the foster children placed in the family.