

Kent Fostering Breaks Policy

(Including Holiday Allowance for Foster Carers)

Integrated Children's Services

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Version 2	September 2023	Addition of day care to children not looked after, digital holiday request form, savings at source & relief carer sign off process, Appendices removed.	Maria Cordrey, Head of Fostering
Version 3	January 2026	Change to respite matching processes (inc: 6 week notice minimum of holiday, deletion of digital form on handbook, responsible SWA in each team for coordinating respite, eradication of 4 night payment rule, clarify SWA undertaking assessment.	Maria Cordrey, Head of Fostering

Contents

Section		Page Number
1	Introduction and Legal Framework	3
2	Types of Break	3
3	Holiday Allowance	4
4	Relief Care Arrangements	5
5	Connected Persons using Relief Carers	6
6	Carer to Carer Breaks	6
7	Record Keeping	7
8	Post Placement or Relief Care Arrangement	7
9	Breaks additional to Holiday Allowance	7
10	Nominated Babysitters	8
11	Day Care	8

1. Introduction & Legal Framework

Standard 21.5 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011) states, “Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to consider the needs of any children placed”.

Kent Fostering recognises that these breaks are an important part of supporting the Foster Carers role, particularly when looking after children and young people who have complex and challenging behaviours or when Foster Carers must attend to other family members needs at times of crisis.

The purpose of this policy therefore, in accordance with Standard 22 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards, The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (5.64-5.73), and Foster Care Agreement Schedule 5 (reg 27 (5) (b)The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; is to provide clarity about the nature, use and where relevant, the type of assessment (including checks), that should take place with those people providing breaks and to give guidance to Integrated Childrens Services staff and Foster Carers about procedures for taking breaks (should carers wish to) in a way that holds the child(ren)/young person at the centre of all decision making.

The principles of the policy should also be applied to those Kent children who are placed with Foster Carers approved by Independent Fostering Agencies.

2. Types of Break

With all alternative care arrangements, Foster Carers and Social Workers must be satisfied that no child in care will experience multiple carers including babysitters.

Relief Carer: A significant family member or friend of the Foster Carer(s), who knows the child(ren)/young person living with them well and who has been specifically assessed and agreed by the Fostering Service to look after the child/young person for short periods of time, either in the main foster carers home or their own home.

Respite Carer: An approved Foster Carer who undertakes carer to carer breaks and is matched with a child/young person already living with Foster Carers, to provide them with regular or one-off breaks (planned or in an emergency).

Nominated Babysitter: A family member or friend of the Foster Carer(s), over the age of 18, and considered by them to be an appropriate adult to manage the needs of the child(ren) / young person for short periods on a regular basis or six times a year or more. This can be for the Foster Carer(s) to attend regular activities or social events for example. The Nominated Babysitter should not look after the child(ren) overnight (unless they are an assessed and agreed Relief Carer).

Day Care: An approved Foster Carer who provides support to fostering families to enable them to attend training, emergency appointments or to have a short

break during the day or evening, or who looks after children **not in care** where there is an identified need for day support and as agreed between both childrens and fostering team managers.

3. Holiday Allowance

Kent County Council Foster Carers are entitled to 14 nights (16 days if Skilled or Advanced Level) holiday allowance per year (1st April – 31st March) for each child in placement (pro rata if the child is in placement for part of the year). They are supported in taking this 14 (or 16) night break (either in one period or several shorter periods) using either an assessed and agreed Relief Carer (a relief care arrangement) or another Kent County Council approved Foster Carer (carer to carer respite placement).

Relief Carers are the preferred option, because as significant people in the foster carers support network and usually wider family members, the children should know them well, they can be additional role models for them and they can offer an enhanced sense of family, more continuity and stability.

Whether using a Relief Carer or another Foster Carer to look after a child or young person for the break, Foster Carers should give as much notice as possible for all holiday requests (an absolute minimum of six weeks), to enable time for the child or young person to be prepared and match them with an alternative Foster Carer if using Carer to Carer Respite or assess the suitability of a Relief Carer and match to the specific child / young person if using this arrangement.

Foster carers must submit requests for holiday to their support team using the Holiday Request Form. Each team has a Social Work Assistant who is responsible for coordinating respite.

When Foster Carers take their 14 (or 16) night holiday and regardless of whether this is done in several short breaks or one main holiday, and whether with a relief or respite carer, the main foster carer/s continue to receive the reward and their skills payment for each child. The maintenance and any enhancements (complex, solo, disability) are paid to the carer looking after the child. The reward is also paid to the relief or respite carer (respite carers will also receive their skills payment).

Where respite care is an assessed and agreed part of the child's care plan to support placement stability both the main foster carer and respite foster carer each receive maintenance, reward, their respective skills level and all enhancements.

If Foster Carers do not take the 14 (or 16) nights as a paid break, they can claim up to 14 (or 16) nights (pro rata) reward element as a one-off payment to use towards the cost of a family holiday for the children. This is to recognise the additional costs of taking children on holiday during school breaks because Children in Care should not be taken out of education in term time for the purpose of a family holiday.

The one-off payment must be claimed by the 1st March each financial year, for processing by the Fostering Team by 31st March. If the maximum 14 (or 16) nights is claimed, no further holiday allowance can be paid for the remainder of the financial year. It is the foster carer's responsibility to claim the payment and no payments will be authorised for missed previous years.

In exceptional circumstances, Foster Carers can take additional holiday allowance above the 14 (or 16) nights, but this will be **unpaid**, a Holiday Request Form must be completed, and the Fostering and Child's Social Workers must agree to the additional nights (This is different from respite care to support placement stability).

Pocket money & savings: Savings will be taken at the source of the maintenance payment in all holiday arrangements and the carer looking after the child will give the child their pocket money.

3. Relief Care Arrangements

A Relief Carer is not an approved Foster Carer. This is because the Foster Carer(s) with whom the child(ren) / young person ordinarily resides, retains responsibility for them during the period of care when they are being looked after by the Relief Carer(s). Paragraph 3.23 of the Fostering Statutory Guidance 2011 states "There is no requirement that where a looked after child visits or spends a holiday with their foster carer's friends or relative that the individual must be approved as a local authority foster carer, as the child will remain formally placed with their usual foster carers".

Where a relative or friend has been identified by the main foster carer as suitable to provide regular overnight stays or longer short breaks to the children in placement, a proportionate assessment of the family member or friends' suitability as a Relief Carer will be undertaken. These assessments may be undertaken by a Social Work Assistant, but must always be overseen by a qualified social worker, who retains responsibility for the reports recommendation.

A foster carer can identify a relative or friend as a prospective Relief Carer for a child / young person placed with them at any time post approval. The fostering team manager will make the decision on the Relief Carer's suitability to look after a child / young person based on the Viability Assessment, checks and references undertaken. It must not be assumed that because a Relief Carer can look after one child or young person for a short period of time that they are able to look after all children and young people placed with the main Foster Carer(s).

The Relief Care arrangement is reviewed as part of the Foster Carers Annual Review and at any other time if there are concerns about the arrangement.

If foster carers wish to nominate another, or additional Relief Carer at any time, they must notify their Fostering Social Worker, who will discuss and initiate the process.

There is no right of representation or appeal against agreement to a relief care arrangement because Relief Carers are not approved local authority foster carers.

Periods of relief care should not exceed 16 nights (depending on the main carers skill level). However, in exceptional circumstances and considering the age of the child/young person, the period in placement, their care plan and their relationship with the Relief Carers, a longer period may be agreed. The agreement of the child's and fostering social workers must be sought and final decision made by the team managers for the child and foster carers. As stated above the Foster Carers additional holiday will be unpaid. The Relief Carer will receive the Reward payment as usual.

5. Connected Persons using Relief Carers

A Relief Carers assessment of family or friends within a Connected Persons Foster Carers support network will be treated the same as mainstream foster carers.

6. Carer to Carer Respite Placements

When planning a break, a foster carer(s) can have preliminary discussions with another foster carer(s) who is known to the child / young person and would be happy to provide care for them. This is helpful as the foster carers are more likely to be able to arrange holiday at a time that fits in with both fostering households and in a way that suits the needs of the child or young person. This is not a substitute or a shortcut for Carer to Carer Respite however, and the correct procedure must be followed, including agreement from both the child's and fostering social workers. When a match is agreed by the Fostering Service, the Liberi Respite Placement Matching Record will be completed by the SWA coordinating the placements and authorised by the Fostering Team Manager (can be delegated to Senior Practitioner or Fostering Social Worker).

All breaks must be discussed with the child / young person and their wishes and feelings considered. If they are going to be looked after by another Foster Carer, and the break is planned, then the child / young person should have the opportunity to visit the Respite Foster Carer, see the home and the room they will be sleeping in. If the break is taken in an emergency, the child must have the opportunity to read the carers family profile and ask their social worker questions. The following should be part of the planning for the period of care:

- The child's birth parent (s) must be consulted about the respite by the child's social worker.
- What authority is delegated to the carers must be discussed, agreed, and recorded on the Carer to Carer Child/Young Person Profile.
- The child/young person's Foster Carer must ensure that the child has all necessary contact numbers should the child have any concerns and need to make contact while they are away.

If planned respite is taking place with another foster carer(s) a temporary placement plan must be completed to ensure all placement moves for a child are recorded and payments are correctly set up for the foster carers. In an emergency as much information must be given to the Respite Carers as possible.

The Child in Care Review will include discussion on all other arrangements for the child or young person's care as part of their care plan.

If by placing a child or young person with another Foster Carer means that the carer has more than three children in placement, an exemption from the usual fostering limits will be required. If the placement is for more than 6 days and outside of the respite carers approval, this should also be changed

7. Record Keeping

There is no expectation that Relief Carers should keep daily diary records about a child/young person who they have looked after, however to preserve memories for the child / young person it's helpful for them to give information to the child's Foster Carer at the end of the arrangement about what activities have been done, places visited, specific achievements, worries that arose or significant events. These can then be incorporated by the Foster Carer(s) into their records for the child.

Respite Foster Carers should keep diary records about the child / young person they look after for respite in the usual way and following the principles set out in the Diary Record Policy.

8. Post placement or relief care arrangement

The child / young person's social worker and the Foster Carers Social Worker should give the child and all carers the opportunity to feedback on how the placement/arrangement went and record this on the child's electronic file and carers electronic supervision record. Should any concerns or issues arise, these must be shared and followed up in a timely way; to give the best chance of resolution and ensure the safety of all children and young people receiving care with other Foster Carers or Relief Carers.

9. Breaks additional to Holiday Allowance to support placement stability

Where it is identified that the Foster Carer(s) needs additional breaks to support the stability of the placement over and above their 14 (or 16) night holiday allowance, this must be agreed as part of the child / young person's care plan and placement arrangements.

Some examples of when additional respite might be required are as follows:

- to enable increased breaks from the demands of looking after a child with severe disabilities or complex health needs.

- to support the fostering family where a child with complex and challenging behaviour restricts family activities.
- there is an emergency within the family that requires the foster carer(s) to be away from the home or if they need a break.

The additional break to support placement stability would usually be with a Carer to Carer Respite placement (not a relief carer).

Payment for Carer to Carer respite stays above the 14 (or 16) nights holiday allowance is covered in the Kent Fostering Payments Policy. Agreement for additional Carer to Carer respite should be presented to The Access to Resources Panel by the Child and Fostering Social Workers for funding agreement and reviewed every six months.

11. Nominated Babysitters

It is good practice for all Foster Carers to have a trusted babysitter identified as part of their support network to provide a few hours break (not overnight) for a foster carer if they need it. Babysitters for children in care must be over the age of 18 years and considered by the Foster Carer to be an appropriate adult to manage the needs of the child or young person for a short period.

Regular babysitters must always have a DBS check and their name and the frequency of the arrangement should be recorded in the Placement Plan and Safe Care Plan for the child / young person.

12. Day Care

Should Foster Carers not be able to identify or access a Nominated Babysitter to provide a few hours break when this is required and it is appropriate for the child / young person, another Kent County Council approved Foster Carer, who can be identified by the main Foster Carer from their own fostering community, can be accessed.

The Foster Carer must inform their Fostering Social Worker that they require day care, providing as much notice as possible.

Foster Carers can also provide day care to children who are known to children's services but are not 'looked after'. This could be for example where a family need support with a disabled child. Any request for this type of day care must be agreed by the Fostering Social Worker in discussion with their Team Manager. Foster Carers cannot provide support, including supervision of family time for children who are not placed with them, to parent/s / families in the community because this is outside of the terms and conditions of their registration with the Fostering Service.