

Overnight Stays and Social Visits Policy

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Regulations and Standards:

The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015:

- Regulation 8 - The education standard
- Regulation 14 - The care planning standard.
- Regulation 22 - Contact and access to communication

Relevant Policies:

For holidays or school trips outside the UK or within the UK over four days see: '[Holidays and School Trips Policy](#)'.

For procedures covering contact with Parents and Siblings, see '[Contact with Parents and Siblings Policy](#)'.

These procedures apply to all significant, unsupervised, contacts or overnight stays between children and relatives, friends (including neighbours and visitors), within or outside the home.

Section 2, 'Arrangements by HND Children's Care Homes' set out the arrangements that may be made by the home for children to have contact or overnight stays up to four days without having to seek the approval of social workers. These procedures also apply to holidays or school trips within the UK, up to four days.

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Section 1 of this procedure applies to contact arrangements, including overnight stays, of more than four days. Procedures relating to contact or overnight stays away of four days or less are set out in Section 2, 'Overnight Stays / Social Visits'.

NOTE: No contact may be permitted between children and their parents, friends or relatives without the approval of the social worker and, preferably, outlined in the child's placement plan (or, at least, in writing). Any restrictions on overnight stays, visits and holidays should be based on clearly stated reasons necessary to safeguard and promote the child's safety or welfare and clearly stated in the child's placement information record and subject to regular review.

When the child's placement is made with HND Children's Care, information regarding relationships with relatives and friends should be obtained from the social worker and arrangements for contacts (including overnight stays) with those people included in the placement plan.

The Parents' views on contact with relatives (including grandparents and half siblings) connected persons and friends should be obtained. See Section 3, 'Parental Consent'. Any such contact arrangements set out in the placement plan must be consistent with the child's care plan and any contact order in force.

2. Social Visits / Overnight Stays:

The following procedure applies to social visits or overnight stays away from the home, of up to four days. For normal contact arrangements e.g., over 4 days, see Section 1, 'Normal Arrangements'.

Looked after, children should, as far as possible should be granted the same permissions to take part in normal and acceptable age-appropriate peer activities as would be reasonably be granted by the parents of their peers. Therefore, residential managers and staff can be given delegated responsibility to make judgements about allowing a looked after child to stay overnight with friends and relatives of the children without the agreement of anyone else who has parental responsibility. However, we would always endeavour to be transparent in our plans and risk assessments with both the child's social worker, and the child's parents (if necessary).

Normally, significant unsupervised contact and overnight stays with relatives and friends should be subject to the agreement of the social worker, having made certain assessments and checks as described above.



However, short contacts / stays - up to four days - including holidays and school trips, can be agreed 'locally' by the manager of the home if the social worker and, preferably, parents have delegated this authority, in writing.

Local authorities may have their own procedures on this matter; if so, home managers must adhere to them.

In the absence of such procedures, the home manager should seek the agreement of social workers on the basis of those procedures outlined below.

If no agreement has been reached, social workers must approve all contacts and stays with relatives, friends and neighbours.

If the social worker does agree, it should be put in writing and any arrangements in relation to the child must be set out in the placement plan.

The circumstances in which these situations arise include the following:

- Sleepovers with friends.
- Unplanned visits to the home by friends after school.
- Invitations to go out for the day with a friend's family where the family are unlikely to be back until late.
- Invitations to join a friend's family who are going away for a weekend.
- Holidays or school trips in the UK
- A child's authorised day visit with a friend or family being extended if the child / young person cannot return due to bad weather or a car breaking down where there are no known restrictions to an overnight stay taking place.

Judgements should be made on a reasonable assessment of risks in the same way as parents make judgements on whether or not there are risks for a child staying in a particular household visiting relatives or someone babysitting. Any restrictions on overnight stays, visits and holidays should be based on clearly stated reasons necessary to safeguard and promote the child's safety or welfare and clearly stated in the child's placement information record and subject to regular review. Managers / social workers and residential staff considering a request from a child to stay overnight with a friend should base their decision on the following factors:

- Are there any relevant restrictions in the child's / young person's placement plan / placement information record?
- Are there any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour to preclude overnight stays?
- Are there any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed.
- Is the child staying with another child / children, rather than staying solely with an adult?
- The age and level of understanding of the child.



- What is the purpose and length of the overnight stay?
- Whose idea was the overnight stay?
- How well is the friend or family known to the child?

Although checks should not normally be required as a precondition of a child staying overnight with friends, in circumstances where it is considered necessary as a result of specific risks identified in the risk assessment, or where the child is to stay with adults regularly or frequently or for a prolonged period, checks on members of the relevant household should be made through the Disclosure and Barring Service, the children's services and probation records for the relevant area.

Where an assessment identifies the need for contact with a relative or friend to be supervised, the social worker should follow the same procedure as for '[Supervised Contact with Parents Policy](#)', contained in '[Contact with Parents and Siblings Policy](#)'.

The placement plan / placement information record should include the parameters within which visits or stays away from the home with friends may be agreed by the carer without prior consultation with the social worker, and whether agreement to such visits requires the carer to obtain parental consent.

Where the child makes new friends (including neighbours) whilst placed, significant unsupervised contact and overnight stays should not normally be made unless the social worker has been consulted and has arranged for the checks and assessments outlined above to be undertaken. The arrangements should then be set out in the placement plan.

Where the managers / social workers and residential staff proposes to agree to the child's stay away, before allowing them to go ahead, certain enquiries must be made by the carer; for example, the name of the adult who will be responsible for the child, the means of contacting the adult and the child during the visit / stay and the arrangements for the child's return. There should be clarity about the sleeping arrangements, whether the child will be sharing a bedroom and, if so, what the arrangements are.

Prior to the child's stay away, the carer should arrange to meet the adult who will have responsibility for the child unless he or she is already known in which case the prior arrangements can be made over the telephone.

The arrangements for supervising or caring for the child must not compromise the safety of the child or of anyone else; and the following considerations should apply:

- Have the arrangements been confirmed with the parent of the friend or the adult who will have responsibility during the visit?
- What are the arrangements for the child returning to the home?
- Is there a contact number for the household in which the child will stay?
- Is the child aware of what to do if he or she wants to return to the home earlier than planned?
- Does the child have a contact number for the carers where they can be reached at any



time?

- Does the child have access to a mobile phone?

In all cases, discussions should be held with the child, dependent on his or her age, as to what, if any, information should be shared with other adults to enable them to look after the child appropriately.

This might include:

- Any specific health care needs of the child.
- Any established routines for the child.
- Any behaviour management problems which, if the adult is unaware of, could lead to difficulties during the visit, for example the child may be over familiar with adults or over assertive with younger children.

Any decision to share information should be on a 'need to know' basis and recorded.

If the child refuses to allow appropriate information to be shared, then he or she needs to be made aware that this could affect the decision to allow the child to stay away from home.

If satisfied that it is appropriate to allow the child's stay away, a decision to allow it to go ahead may be made. If not, it may not be allowed.

Even if it has been agreed that the social worker does not have to be consulted in making these arrangements, s/he must still be informed as soon as practicable afterwards (within 1 working day) and the social worker should inform the parents as appropriate if they haven't been informed by ourselves already.

With older teenagers, there is greater risk to their safety and wellbeing as they explore and test greater levels of independence. This applies to children living at home as well as to those who are looked after by a local authority and it is inevitable that in some cases, despite the care taken, things will go wrong.

It is the intention of this procedure to protect children and to carry out our duty as reasonable and responsible parents. It is also intended to enable carers and social workers to demonstrate that if something goes wrong, they have taken all reasonable precautions to protect the child.

If satisfied that it is appropriate to allow the contact, a decision to allow the contact to go ahead may be made. If not, the contact may not be allowed. The decision and the contact arrangements, if agreed, should be recorded in full in the child's daily records. Even if it has been agreed that the social worker does not have to be consulted in making these arrangements, s/he must still be informed as soon as practicable afterwards and the social worker should inform the parents as appropriate.

3. Parental Consent:



Wherever possible, and if appropriate to do so, parents' views and consent to contact with relatives and friends including any overnight stays away from HND Children's Care homes, should be obtained at the time of the placement.

The child's legal status and the role of the parents in day-to-day decision making, as outlined in the care plan, should be considered.

These views should be recorded including an indication of whether the parent wishes to be notified or their consent obtained every time an overnight stay takes place and if so, whether such consultation and prior consent is required before the contact can go ahead.

It should also be clearly recorded if parents do not consent to any continuing relationships or short stays away from the home, and the reasons for their lack of consent should be obtained.

If it is considered that contact is appropriate despite the parents' views, advice from legal services may be required and any decision to allow such contact needs to be clearly recorded together with reasons and explained to the parents.

4. Changing the Arrangements:

Where the arrangements must be changed or contact must be cancelled or postponed, the child's social worker should be consulted or informed as soon as possible afterwards. It will also be necessary to consult / inform the relative / friend and make a new arrangement if possible.

Contact arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

5. Review of Contact Arrangements:

All contacts with relatives, friends and neighbours should be discussed at placement planning meetings.

Any contact arrangements which are agreed as a result of new friendships formed during the child's placement should be included in the placement plan when it is reviewed.

The reasons for any change in the contact arrangements must be clearly recorded.

Where contact arrangements are contained within a contact order, legal advice should be obtained before the changes are implemented. An application to the court will be required where the changes are not agreed.

End.