

## Fosterline Wales Factsheet: Keeping and sending information confidentially

### Introduction

Keeping clear and accurate records is a key part of a foster carer's job. Storing that information safely and securely is essential. These days, a lot of information is stored and sent electronically, quick and convenient but there are pitfalls. This factsheet helps you understand your responsibilities in respect of keeping and sending confidential information.

### Welsh legislation and standards

[The National Minimum Standards for Fostering](#) (NMS) stipulate that carers must store information about children or young people securely and understand what information they are expected to keep and what information needs to be passed on to the fostering service. Also, that you understand what information you are expected to keep and what needs to be returned to the fostering service. [The Data Protection Act 1998](#) governs the use of personal information and the protection of data that relates to any individual. It applies to you as a foster carer in terms both of the information held on children and young people in your care and the information about you held by your fostering service.

Data protection is governed by eight core principles. It's important you understand what they mean for you as a foster carer. These require information to be:

- fairly and lawfully processed
- obtained and used lawfully and for specific purposes
- adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- not kept longer than necessary
- processed in accordance with an individual's rights
- kept secure
- not transferred (i.e. sent by you) without adequate protection.

This applies to all information, whether it is on paper or stored electronically on your computer. The principles of secure storage are essentially the same.

This can seem complex. Familiarise yourself with the policies and procedures of your fostering service which should be data protection compliant. Also check your service's recording policy and practice, which guides you on what you record about the children and young people in your care and how you record it. If in doubt, ask your fostering service for clarification.

Your records are open to the child's social worker, your fostering service and any other authorised professional. This includes any court proceedings regarding the child or young person.

## **Data protection and fostering**

Store all written records in a secure place. This should be a locked cabinet or something similar where only you have access. This includes your daily log as well as the child's records.

All records held electronically must also be secure. This includes information held on your computer, emails, your tablet and your mobile phone.

Make sure you maintain basic security on your devices:

- All devices should be password protected.
- Documents and your email account are protected with a separate password.
- The password is not something obvious and/or known to your family.
- Install anti-virus protection.
- Install parental controls.
- Close your browser windows and email at the end of every session.
- Don't use public computers.
- Don't use a portable device if anyone can look over your shoulder.

Some fostering services are introducing a secure record system with a preloaded encryption package which may be linked to the service's main information storage system. If so, follow their guidelines. Take basic precautions with the devices themselves. Laptops, mobiles and tablets are easy to lose. Don't leave them unattended in cars or public places. It is strongly advised not to keep any confidential information on your mobile phone.

Do not store confidential information on a USB memory stick, memory card or other portable storage.

## **Sharing Information**

Only disclose information, whether it is stored electronically or on paper, to those who need to know, such as a doctor needing past medical history. Even then, only disclose the minimum information needed in such circumstances, then consult with your fostering service or the child's social worker.

Do not send reports and information via email unless the documents and mail itself are password protected or preferably encrypted. Your fostering service may provide encryption software for this purpose. It's easy to slip up on this. Think about what you include in emails to your fostering service and the child's social worker. Don't use the full names of children and young people even in a basic email.

When a child or young person has left your care, return all information to your fostering service.

## **Access to information**

You are entitled to see information about you that is held by your fostering service.

Similarly, children and young people in your care may have access their files held by social services.

There are exceptions, the main ones being information provided by third parties and where procedures are established by the regulations and/or other bodies. For example, you are not able to see the referee reports that form part of your fostering assessment.

All organisations must have a policy and procedure for accessing records. Note that you can see only your records. Children and young people cannot see anything that relates to other family members without specific permission.

## **How The Fostering Network can help**

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

### **Advice**

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us or write to us at:

[Fosterlinewales@fostering.net](mailto:Fosterlinewales@fostering.net)

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

### **Support and resources**

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters. [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

This Fostering Network article offers advice on managing security and passwords:

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/blogs/kieran-mcquire/using-password-manager](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/blogs/kieran-mcquire/using-password-manager)

### **Publications**

Safer caring: a new approach

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/training-and-events/in-house-training/safer-caring-new-approach](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/training-and-events/in-house-training/safer-caring-new-approach)

Fostering in a digital world

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/fostering-in-digital-world](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/fostering-in-digital-world)

Record keeping

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/being-foster-carer/record-keeping](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/being-foster-carer/record-keeping)

### **Training and consultancy**

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact our learning and development manager, Sarah Mobedji at

[sarah.mobedji@fostering.net](mailto:sarah.mobedji@fostering.net).

## **About The Fostering Network**

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

### **Contact us**

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Telephone: 029 2044 0940

Email: [wales@fostering.net](mailto:wales@fostering.net)

Web: [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)



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