

Fosterline Wales Factsheet: Guidance on fostering and pets in the home

Introduction

Pets are part of family life and, therefore, part of fostering. Having pets does not prevent you from fostering, in fact, they can be an asset to a foster family. However, every animal is different and your pets will be assessed as part of the process of becoming a foster carer, and indeed any ongoing assessment, taking into account factors, such as their temperament and behaviour.

Pets are not mentioned in the fostering regulations or National Minimum Standards for Wales, so here are some guidelines to consider if you have a pet or are thinking of getting one. It is also worth noting that, depending on the types of pet you have, you may be restricted to the ages of children you can foster.

Family life, fostering and pets – getting the balance right

In many households, pets are an important part of family life. Pets can be good for children's well-being. Through animals, children can learn about caring and being cared for. They are a source of companionship and unconditional affection. They assist communication, especially when a child joins the family, and they can help form attachments too.

At the same time, pets may pose a risk to health and safety, however slight it may at first appear. This needs to be understood by carers and carefully assessed by the fostering service. The child's needs must always come first - some children are afraid of some animals, others have an allergic reaction. Equally, some children have a history of known violence and aggression towards animals. As a pet owner, you also need to think about how you would feel and react if one of your pets was injured by a child.

Therefore, there needs to be an assessed balance between the benefits of having a pet and the potential risks. This differs from home to home, child to child, pet to pet, so there can be no blanket policy that covers everything. Pets are part of the matching process - each child is an individual.

The legal framework

There are no requirements as to the keeping of pets in the fostering regulations or National Minimum Standards for Wales.

Some pets, such as dangerous dogs or venomous reptiles, are incompatible with fostering. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 prohibits all households from the keeping of certain breeds. Currently banned are:

- Pit Bull Terrier
- Japanese Tosa

- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro.

You should also be aware that more than one dog can be defined as a pack. Some fostering services specify two dogs, others three. The service may have a policy to not accept applications from household with a pack of dogs.

Pets in the household

Household pets should be part of the assessment process for prospective foster carers. Having a pet should not prevent you from being a foster carer. Fostering services will keep the pet assessment updated every year as part of the annual foster carer review.

Your fostering service will have a specific pet assessment. They might ask an animal behaviourist to complete a specialist assessment on your dog, cat or any other pet. This may sound extreme, especially if you have a docile dog or cat, for instance. However, it is in your interests to have this assessment on record. It's about protecting the children in your care, you and the pet.

There is no universal standard format. The Fostering Network's The Skills to Foster™ course suggests these general areas:

- How and where will the animals be kept?
- Will they be accessible to children?
- What are the health and safety risks?
- How would the carer feel if the child hurt the animal?
- Does the pet use part of the garden as a toilet? Is this closed off?

Points to consider:

- How would you describe the animal's temperament?
- How does your pet react to strangers?
- Has there been an incident in the past where your pet has injured somebody?
- How does it react to being touched or stroked?
- Does it respond consistently in different situations?
- Does it respond to commands?
- If the pet is kept in a cage or tank, is it childproof?
- Pet hygiene - where is the pet fed, where is it allowed to go in the house, is pet food kept separate from human food, do you wash your hands after feeding your pet?

Fostered children and pets

Children and young people come first. Think about how they might feel about your pet. You know your old cat just wants to be left alone to sleep most of the day, or your beloved working dog is as friendly as can be, but the child may not be aware of these things.

The National Minimum Standards for Wales require that, where possible, each child has the opportunity for a period of introduction to a proposed foster carer, so they can express an informed view about the placement and become familiar with the carer's family. Include your pet in your family profile and safer caring policy – they are part of the family too.

Before a new child comes to live with you, check their views about pets and anything in their history about loving pets or being violent towards them. Are they allergic to pet fur?

Your fostering service should include the pet in any risk assessment linked to the matching process.

You should inform your fostering service if you are intending to add a pet to the household. It is recommended this should be in advance so the service can make a risk assessment.

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

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

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.

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:

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