

# FASD AND FOSTER CARE



## WHAT is this Factsheet about?

Foster carers have a key role to play in identifying and responding to unmet health needs of children in their care.

You may be the first person to recognise that your child has or may have Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

This Factsheet explains:

- what information about FASD you might receive on placement;
- why you should discuss FASD at annual medicals;
- what support a foster child might access if they have or may have FASD;
- how to access your own support if your foster child has or may have FASD; and
- where to get further information.

## KEY POINTS:

- FASD is often called the “hidden epidemic” because it is believed to affect more people than autism.
- A significant proportion of children with FASD have experience of foster care.
- Carers of children and young people living in foster care need to understand FASD to be able to seek diagnosis and support.
- Every child with FASD is different but early intervention can make a significant difference to a foster child’s life.
- Ensuring appropriate support for a child with FASD is critical to promote positive lives.

## UNDERSTAND your rights

### How do I know if my foster child has FASD?

You may be told that your foster child has FASD or that FASD is suspected. However, children with FASD are often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed and you may be the first person to recognise that FASD may be affecting your child.

Foster carers play a key role in identifying FASD and advocating for children with FASD. **What is FASD?** on the FASD Network UK website explains what FASD is and what to look out for.

### Will I be told if my child has FASD prior to placement?

Prior to the foster placement you will be given information about the child. It may say that the child has or may have FASD. It may state whether the child was exposed to alcohol whilst in the womb. Even if this information is on the child’s records, it is often overlooked, ignored or is simply unknown.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 states that **you have a right to general information about the child, including any health needs, disabilities and level of development.**

Carers have day-to-day responsibility for making sure those needs are met. If you are struggling to get information, then ask the child’s social worker to obtain the wider paperwork from previous carers or previous health assessments.

The **placement plan** should include any specific needs the child has, and social workers and other authority officers should ensure the needs of the child can be met.

The Local Authority (LA) that looks after the child must ensure that every child it looks after has an up-to-date **individual health plan**. The development of the health plan forms part of the child’s overall care plan and should be based on the written report of the health assessment.

**It is a duty on the LA in carrying out their functions to identify all the children and young people in their area who have or may have special educational needs (SEN) or may have a disability** s22 Children and Families Act 2014.

Anyone can bring a child or young person who they believe has or probably has SEN or a disability to the attention of the LA (s24 of the Children and Families Act 2014). See Factsheet **-FASD** and SEND and **-FASD DISABILITY OR LEARNING DIFFICULTY?**

## UNDERSTAND your rights

### Should FASD be considered as part of the foster child's annual medicals?

LAs are responsible for making sure a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs is carried out for every child they look after.

The LA must have regard to the statutory guidance 'Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children' from the Department of Education and the Department of Health.

Paragraph 44 states "*Health assessments should pay particular attention to health conditions that may be more prevalent in looked after children (such as foetal alcohol syndrome or attachment difficulties) and which may otherwise have been misdiagnosed*".

### What support might my foster child receive if he/she has or may have FASD?

Their social worker will need to provide permission to move forwards with a diagnostic referral and should review their health, education and social care needs.

#### Social worker support

The frequency of social worker visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and the LA must arrange a visit whenever reasonably requested by a child or foster carer regardless of the status of the placement. Social workers are also responsible for providing advice, support and assistance between visits.

#### Independent advocates for young people

Your foster child can raise concerns with their social worker and escalate concerns to the social work manager, IRO or an independent advocate for young people.

The National Youth Advocacy Service provides advocacy and legal representation to children and vulnerable adults when important decisions are being made about them.

Coram Voice provides an advocacy helpline if your young person is in care, leaving care or needs help from Children's Services.

### What support might I receive if my foster child has or might have FASD?

**Training:** Training may be available from your LA where carers must meet a child's specific needs. The

LA must provide foster carers with adequate training and support.

**Respite care:** Each foster carer will be under a contract which sets out agreed respite allowances. If your child has significant additional needs, then that allowance may need to be renegotiated with the LA to meet placement stability needs.

**School:** The Virtual School provides access to a multidisciplinary team comprising those involved in supporting the education of looked-after children. Search your LA's website for details of your LA's Virtual School.

Schools can access additional funding through **Pupil Premium Plus** for each foster child. The purpose of the fund is to benefit the foster child by providing educational and developmental support. The Virtual School is responsible for managing Pupil Premium Plus grants. The process for accessing the grant through the Virtual School will vary in each LA and so you will need to contact your Virtual School Head.

Schools have a **positive** duty to support Looked-After-Children (CLA) and must have a Looked-After-Child designated teacher and a SENCo. The school will also have a governor responsible for Looked-After-Children and a governor responsible for SEN.

If you believe your foster child is not receiving proper support from the school, speak to the CLA designated teacher and the SENCo. If that does not work, then ask for the name and contact details of the CLA governor and the designated SEN governor and raise your concerns.

### Am I entitled to financial help?

If you are caring for a child with a disability, you should discuss any adjustment to the placement fee with your social worker.

You may apply for benefits such as **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** but you must seek permission of the social worker first. Click [HERE](#) for help filling in the DLA Form. There is also a Disability Living Allowance helpline 0800 121 4600.

If DLA is awarded there will need to be protocols put in place for how to use that funding. It is the child's funding, and all spending must be accounted for.

You may be able to claim **Carer's Allowance** if your foster child gets DLA or a **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)**. The **Fostering Advice Service** may help if you have any questions.

## MYTHBUSTERS

### My social worker is saying that my foster child does not need an FASD diagnosis

If you suspect the child in your care is affected by FASD, a diagnosis is important. Individuals who are aware of and can accept their condition are more likely to live their best lives. Your foster child has the right to appropriate health support which includes a diagnosis of medical conditions so that they can understand the challenges they are experiencing and can receive the correct care and support.

### My child is about to turn 18 and is very vulnerable. The LA are expecting him to be fine in a flat on his own at 18 with no extra support.

A transition plan must reflect all the needs of a young person including their health and wellbeing. The voices of the young adult, foster carer and the social worker will matter. Cognitive and adaptive functioning assessments can help understand their support needs before they become an adult. Some may need a Mental Capacity Assessment to understand vulnerabilities and the levels of support

which may be needed to promote positive transitions. **Staying Put** arrangements and **Shared Lives Schemes** could also be explored when moving into adulthood.

### My child is vulnerable and easily led astray with social media and friends. The social worker says I must supply them with full access to all technology so they can make their own decisions/mistakes.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Flag up safety concerns. If you see increasing vulnerability, additional services for exploitation or specialist children's or youth workers may be brought in to support you and your child.

### My foster baby is to be adopted and I have been told not to tell the adopters that this baby is at a high risk of FASD.

It is the social work team that have a duty to provide all health information for adopters. You can tell them about your daily parenting experiences with the child, but the LA is legally responsible. Contact the IRO if you continue to have concerns.

## HOW can I challenge my rights?

### What can I do if I disagree with the child's social worker?

As a foster parent you do not have parental responsibility so this can limit the rights you have over your foster child.

As a foster carer you have your own supervising social worker who is there to discuss your concerns and navigate a pathway for you to feel heard.

If you have raised your concerns in care reviews, with the IRO and your supervising social worker, you can utilise the complaints process for your child's local authority - click [HERE](#).

Written by Velma Eyre with thanks to the support of the legal Pro bono team at Clyde and Co LLP. This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended to constitute legal advice.

## KEY RESOURCES:

### GUIDANCE

- [Local council support for children and families - Citizens Advice](#)
- [Department of Education - Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers](#)
- [How to claim DLA](#)

### HELPFUL ORGANISATIONS

- [The Fostering Network](#)
- [Fosterline](#)
- [The National Youth Advocacy Service](#)
- [Corum Voice](#)

### KEY LEGISLATION

- [Statutory SEND Code of Practice](#)
- [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#)
- [The Children and Families Act 2014](#)
- [Statutory Guidance: Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children](#)