

Undertaking ‘Placing Alongside’ and Bedroom Sharing Risk Assessments

Paul Adams 2023



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1.Introduction

This brief practice note has been written to support practitioners who are undertaking 'placing alongside' and bedroom sharing risk assessments as part of a wider matching process for children being placed with foster carers. It allows for the sharing of two forms that have been developed for this purpose, and these are contained towards the end of this practice note:

- 'Placing alongside' risk assessment form
- Bedroom sharing risk assessment form

2.Matching and risk assessment

Ofsted (2020, p.3) note the importance of matching:

Matching children to the right foster families is critically important for children's futures. Good matching decisions can help to ensure that fostered children have a secure base, feel loved and can enjoy their lives... When matches do not work, it leads to further distress and instability for children, many of whom will have already experienced significant previous disruption and trauma.

Good matching cannot be achieved without gathering good quality information about the child or children being matched, and central to that information is a well-informed individual risk assessment. Adams (2021) has developed Form R as a tool to support practitioners with producing individual risk assessment and management plans, and the form is accompanied by detailed good practice guidance.

These individual risk assessment and management plans - also known as Individual Safeguarding Plans - will be crucial when it comes to undertaking 'placing alongside' or bedroom sharing risk assessments. Without the former, it will be impossible to safely and effectively complete the latter. Where a child does not have a comprehensive and well-informed risk assessment and management plan, this should be completed before there is any consideration of 'placing alongside' or bedroom sharing.

3. 'Placing alongside'

'Placing alongside' refers to situations where consideration is being given to placing a child with a foster carer who is already fostering another child. In these situations, it is suggested that practitioners use the 'placing alongside' risk assessment form that is contained within this practice note, or something equivalent.¹

One form should be used for each child who is already living with the foster carer, and the form asks for the following information:

- the name/ initials of the child already placed with the foster carer, including age, gender, and date that their risk assessment and management plan was completed
- the name/ initials of the child being considered for placement with the foster carer, including age, gender, and date that their risk assessment and plan was completed
- any identified potential risks relating to the child already in placement, and consideration of the extent to which these can be mitigated or managed
- any identified potential risks relating to the child being considered for placement, and consideration of the extent to which these can be mitigated or managed
- the views of the child already in placement, and the views of their social worker
- the views of the child being considered for the placement, and the views of their social worker
- analysis of the evidence, leading to a recommendation about whether 'placing alongside' is safe and appropriate
- the names and signatures of the supervising social worker and their manager

It is worth highlighting Regulation 22(3)(b) of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, that requires anyone placing a child with a foster carer to seek the consent of any other local authority who already has a child placed with that carer. In practice that means contacting the social worker for a child already in placement, and seeking their agreement to the proposed additional placement. It would not be lawful to go ahead with the proposed placement without that social worker's consent, and good practice requires that this is provided or confirmed in writing.

¹ This form is not designed for use when considering placing siblings together, and Beckett (2021) provides tools and guidance that are more appropriate to that particular task.

Research about 'placing alongside' is very limited, and consideration of matching with other children in the foster home tends to focus primarily on birth children, and on the issue of age. Even that evidence is unclear and inconsistent. Hojer et al (2013, p.7) writes:

Some research suggests that there is an increased risk for placement breakdown if foster carers have children of their own living at home... [but others have] concluded that those carers whose children lived with them had lower rates of disrupted placements.

Others have summarised the research findings in a similar way, and while they recognise that the evidence is inconclusive, nevertheless tend to urge caution about placing children together when they are of very similar ages:

General practice recommends an age gap with carers' own children, although this guidance should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
(Ott, 2017)

While no hard and fast rule exists, one should at least be wary of placing children where there are already children of a similar age.
(Cousins, 2011, p.52)

Without a strong evidence base it will be for the practitioners to use their judgement based on what is known about the individual children under consideration, including their wishes and feelings about the proposed arrangement.

4. Bedroom sharing

National Minimum Standard 10.6 specifically addresses the issue of bedroom sharing:

In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

When considering the possibility of bedroom sharing by children, it is suggested that practitioners use the bedroom sharing risk assessment form that is included in this

practice note, or something equivalent. The form is designed in a way that considers the needs of all the children who may be sharing the room, and is suitable for use with sibling, or non-sibling groups. It asks for the following information:

- the name of the foster carer and the name/ initials of the children being considered for the room sharing, with the date that each risk assessment was completed
- an explanation of why room sharing is being proposed and whether alternatives that do not involve room sharing have been considered
- a description of the proposed bedroom, including information about the extent to which it would allow for each child to have their own space
- the concerns, if any, identified in each child's risk assessment and management plan
- information about bedtime routines, and issues such as enuresis (wetting), encopresis (soiling), or any history of disrupted sleep including nightmares
- the views of each child, and the views of each child's social worker
- the identification of any risks, and consideration of the extent to which these can be mitigated or managed
- analysis of the evidence, leading to a recommendation about whether bedroom sharing is safe and appropriate
- the names and signatures of the supervising social worker and their manager

The suitability or otherwise of a bedroom sharing arrangement will largely depend on the history of each child, their needs associated with sleeping and bedroom space, and their relationships with each other. Where any child, or any social worker, has reservations about a proposed arrangement, this should be taken very seriously.

5. Conclusion

The guidance provided in this practice note is very general, and actual practice in a fostering service will need to be supported by local policies and procedures that consider matching generally, but also the specifics of 'placing alongside' and bedroom sharing. Those policies and practices should:

- recognise both the potential risks and potential benefits associated with 'placing alongside' and bedroom sharing
- ensure that decisions are made in a way that meets the individual needs of each child, and
- are underpinned by the principles of listening effectively to children, social workers, and foster carers

‘Placing alongside’ risk assessment form

Name of foster carer(s)

Name or initials of child already in placement	Gender	Age	Date of individual risk assessment

Name or initials of child being considered for placement	Gender	Age	Date of individual risk assessment

Identified risks - child already in placement
<i>Using this child’s risk assessment and management plan, set out the risks that might be relevant if another child is placed with this foster carer.</i>
How and to what extent can these be mitigated or managed?

Identified risks - child being considered for placement
<i>Using the risk assessment and management plan for the child being considered for placement, set out the risks that might be relevant if they are placed.</i>
How and to what extent can these be mitigated or managed?

Views of the child already in placement	
What are the views of the child who is already in placement about the proposed new placement?	
Their social worker's views on the proposed new placement	
Name of social worker	
Date they were consulted	
Agreement to proposed placement	YES/ NO
What are the views of the social worker for the child who is already in placement about the proposed new placement? If these have been provided in writing they can be copied and pasted here.	

Views of the child who is being considered for placement	
What are the views of the child who is being considered for placement?	
Their social worker's views on the proposed new placement	
Name of social worker	
Date they were consulted	
Agreement to proposed placement	YES/ NO
What are the views of the social worker for the child who is being considered for placement? If these have been provided in writing they can be copied and pasted here.	

Recommendation and reasons
State whether 'placing alongside' is safe and appropriate in this situation. Provide reasons.

Name of supervising social worker	
Signature of supervising social worker	
Date	

Name of fostering manager	
Signature of fostering manager	
Date	

Bedroom sharing risk assessment form

Name of foster carer(s)

Name or initials of child 1	Gender	Age	Date of individual risk assessment

Name or initials of child 2	Gender	Age	Date of individual risk assessment

Name or initials of child 3	Gender	Age	Date of individual risk assessment

Describe the proposed room sharing arrangement
<i>Explain why room sharing is being proposed and how/whether alternatives that do not involve room sharing have been considered. Describe the proposed bedroom and consider the extent to which that allows for each child to have their own space. Note: upper bunk beds should not be used for children aged under 6.</i>

Child 1: Identified risks

Set out any risks from the child's risk assessment and management plan that are relevant to room sharing.

Description of bedtime routine and any sleep issues

Set out what is known about current bedtime routines. Note any relevant issues such as enuresis (wetting), encopresis (soiling), or any history of disrupted sleep including nightmares.

Child's views on the proposed plan**Child's social worker's views on the proposed plan**

If their views have been provided in writing they can be copied and pasted here. Include the name of the child's social worker and state when and how they were consulted.

Child 2: Identified risks

Set out any risks from the child's risk assessment and management plan that are relevant to room sharing.

Description of bedtime routine and any sleep issues

Set out what is known about current bedtime routines. Note any relevant issues such as enuresis (wetting), encopresis (soiling), or any history of disrupted sleep including nightmares.

Child's views on the proposed plan**Child's social worker's views on the proposed plan**

If their views have been provided in writing they can be copied and pasted here. Include the name of the child's social worker and state when and how they were consulted.

Child 3: Identified risks

Set out any risks from the child's risk assessment and management plan that are relevant to room sharing.

Description of bedtime routine and any sleep issues

Set out what is known about current bedtime routines. Note any relevant issues such as enuresis (wetting), encopresis (soiling), or any history of disrupted sleep including nightmares.

Child's views on the proposed plan**Child's social worker's views on the proposed plan**

If their views have been provided in writing they can be copied and pasted here. Include the name of the child's social worker and state when and how they were consulted.

Other information

Provide any other information that is relevant. That might include the views of the proposed foster carers, or any family members, or any other factors that need to be considered.

What are the identified risks in this situation?
How and to what extent can these be mitigated or managed?
Recommendation and reasons
<i>State whether room sharing is safe and appropriate in this situation. Provide reasons.</i>

Name of supervising social worker	
Signature of supervising social worker	
Date	

Name of fostering manager	
Signature of fostering manager	
Date	

References

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Access and citation

This practice note is made freely available with the intention of supporting good practice in the fostering sector.

It should be cited as Adams P (2023), *Undertaking 'placing alongside' and bedroom sharing risk assessments*, available at www.pauladamsfostering.uk

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