



# Phoenix Community Care Ltd Foster Care Agency Policy & Procedure

## 0217 - Ownership of Pets

Version	Written	Updated/ Review	Scheduled Review Date	Author/ Reviewer	Approving Body	Date Approved
1	2012		2013	Gena Areola	Directors	
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## **POLICY STATEMENT ON PET OWNERSHIP BY FOSTER CARERS**

PCC Fostering Care Agency gives paramount consideration to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout their childhood. Within this context, the Agency is happy for prospective foster carers to have household pets.

### **DANGEROUS PETS**

However, it is recognised that some pets, particularly dogs, can pose dangers, therefore the Agency will not accept anyone as a prospective foster carer who possesses a pet listed as dangerous in legislation.

We will consider applications from potential foster carers who own any breed of dog that is not registered or required to be registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991/1997. These are:

Pit Bull Terriers

Japanese Towsers

Dogo Argentines

Fila Brazillieros

We will carry out a safety assessment of all dogs in applicants' homes. Special caution will be taken when assessing households containing an Alsatian/German Shepherd, Rottweiler, Doberman, Bulldog or more than two dogs of any breed. Where there is any doubt guidance should be sought from the RSPCA.

Applications will not be considered from anyone owning a pet that must be registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

### **NUMBERS OF DOGS/PETS IN A FOSTER HOME**

Two dogs will be the maximum in a foster home.

(a) because of the likelihood for a pack instinct to develop.

(b) more than 2 dogs require a great deal of attention and time when looked after appropriately.

### **SIZE OF DOG/PET**

It is recognised that dogs can attack children. The real risk is not usually related to the breed of dog but to the size. Small dogs may attack, but it is large dogs that have the strength to seriously maim or kill. Therefore when assessing a family this should be taken into consideration when making the final recommendation to the Panel.

The Fostering Panel should take into account any dogs or pets when approving a family and address the minimum age of child to be placed.

It would be of added help if a prospective carer can show that they and their dog have undertaken dog training/obedience classes.

### **WORKING DOGS AND ANIMALS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Where prospective Carers have working dogs i.e. Police dogs/Farm dogs/Sheep dogs; these must be kept in a secure area outside the home where children cannot gain access. The assessing Social Worker will need to see the area and satisfy themselves that children could not gain access. A report/letter from the family's vet detailing the type of work undertaken by the animal would need to be included in presentation to the panel.

### **ANIMALS/DOGS KEPT FOR BREEDING**

This will require individual assessment; however the Social Worker will need to satisfy themselves that the pets are kept separately where children cannot gain access. It is important to note that even the most placid animals can become aggressive when they are protecting their young.

### **ASSESSMENTS**

When assessing a family to become Foster Carers it is important to include discussions with regard to the pets in the household. It is the responsibility of the prospective carer to prove the temperament of a dog/or pets in their household. Prospective carers must develop a clear written procedure with regard to the introduction of foster children to dogs (or other pets where applicable).

In all cases, the Pet Ownership Questionnaire will be completed and will form part of the full assessment. The completed questionnaire will be kept on the applicant's file, along with the foster carer assessment information. This questionnaire will be reviewed every time a new pet is planned to introduce the household, and reviewed as part of the annual foster carer review. No Looked after Child should be left alone at any time with a dog or pet until the Foster Carer is confident that there is a positive relationship between the child and pet to ensure the child's safety. The Foster Carer must inform the child's Social Worker they are proposing to do this.

### **HEALTH, SAFETY & HYGIENE**

It is important to be aware of the health risks that can be associated with pets e.g. Cats Scratches and bites which can cause Toxic Plasmosis.

Dogs Campylobacter or Toxocaridosis infection.

Parrots Psittacosis.

Dogs and Cats should be wormed and fleaed regularly. All vaccinations should be up-to-date. Carers should be able to support this with a certificate or letter from their vet (this should be noted on the assessment form as well as on the Carers annual review).

All outside areas should be kept clean of fouling. Pets in cages must be kept clean and gloves should be worn when cleaning. Gloves should also be worn when cleaning cat litter trays.

Where cats are kept, babies should be protected by the use of a net on prams and pushchairs.

### **NEW PETS**

If following approval as a carer the family decide to get a dog or other pet, they must consider taking the following actions first.

- (a) Consider carefully what sort of dog/pet would fit approval
- (b) Seek background information on the dog/pet e.g. age, history etc.
- (c) Seek expert advice on how to handle/manage the pet given the fostering tasks undertaken and the possible behaviour of Looked after Children.
- (d) Consult with Fostering Social Worker once all information is known. The Fostering Social Worker can then take further advice from an expert or refer to Panel for approval/review.

### **DOGS/PETS CURRENTLY IN PLACEMENT**

Where existing Carers have either more than 2 dogs or a large dog, Fostering Social Workers should visit each Carer to look at their approval and registration, i.e. if a Carer is registered for babies or toddlers but has a large dog, their approval age will need to be formally reviewed. Where more than 2 dogs are in a foster home, this too will need to be formally reviewed. It is important to note that by reviewing each case individually, both the needs of the child and addressing the pet within the family will ensure safety for all.

### **EMERGENCY FOSTER PLACEMENTS**

It is more likely that emergency or remand placements may have any age of child arriving at anytime of the day or night, it is therefore particularly important that Carers who offer this service do not have pets who may pose a risk to a particular child, i.e. large dogs as it is not known what age/size of child may be placed. If a dog is in the household, a 24-hour settling period should occur before the child is introduced to the pet.

### **VISITING ANIMALS**

It is important to note that where Foster Carers have friends/relatives with pets visiting their house this Policy would apply.

### **ACTION SHOULD A PET INJURE A CHILD**

If a dog or other pet in the household bite, scratches or injures a child the Carer must take the following actions immediately:

- (a) Remove the animal from the house
- (b) Give the child first aid and seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- (c) Notify the Fostering Social Worker or Fostering Team Manager.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR PET OWNERS APPROVED AS FOSTER CARERS BOTH PRIOR TO PLACEMENT OF CHILD AND AFTERWARDS**

No matter how well you feel you know your pet, they are animals and can demonstrate behaviours you may never have seen if they feel frightened, or under threat. As a potential carer of children, you must accept this as a possibility.

Consult your vet for advice.

- Do not change the routine of the pet(s).
- Do not change pet(s) eating/exercise habits.
- Consider areas pet(s) is allowed into, the pet has established its territory and change would be unwelcome to it. However, it may be necessary to instigate change due to safety or health issues i.e. pet sleeping in bedroom. It is therefore important to introduce any changes at an early stage to avoid association with arrival of child.
- Do not muzzle the pet(s).

To integrate child and pet(s) may be a slow process:-

- Increase affection shown to your pet(s) after placement to lessen jealousy of a child.

Avoid pet(s) witnessing all of the affection being shown to a child, to avoid exclusion from attention given.

- Introduce your pet to the child slowly. A large dog may be friendly to you, but can appear terrifying to a young child. Safety gates may need to be used for a while until both get used to each other.

If in any doubt consult your vet for advice about the behaviour of your pet(s).

Pet Questionnaire for Foster Carers			
Details of Foster Carer			
Family name:		Given names	
Date of birth		Gender	
Ethnicity		Tel:	
Address		Mobile	
		Email	
Date form completed			

What type of animals do you keep?	
Are any of the above working/breeding animals	
What areas of your house and garden do your pets have access to during the day?	
Where are your pets fed?	
Where do they sleep?	
What are your pets' daily routines?	
Where are your pets toileted?	
Who, within your family are responsible for your pets?	
Is your pet in good health? Does your pet require any regular medical care or immunisations?	
What is the name of the veterinary practice that you use?	
Is your pet insured?	

Does your insurance cover legal fees & damage to third parties?	
Please give an assessment of your pet's temperament, including how they respond to strangers, children and other dogs/animals.	
Has your pet ever bitten, snarled or snapped at any other person?	
For dog owners only: is the breed of your dog deemed to be compatible with children?	
Are your pets used to contact with children?	
If there are any problems between your pet/s and fostered child what action might you take to deal with the situation?	
If you are breeding from your animals where does the birthing take place and what happens to the young?	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To be completed by assessing Social Worker

<p>Have you had the opportunity to observe and spend time with the family pet/s during your assessment?</p>	
<p>What, in your opinion, is the pet's status within the family?</p>	
<p>What are the considerations about a looked after child being placed alongside this family pet/s?</p>	

Name of assessing Social Worker: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_