

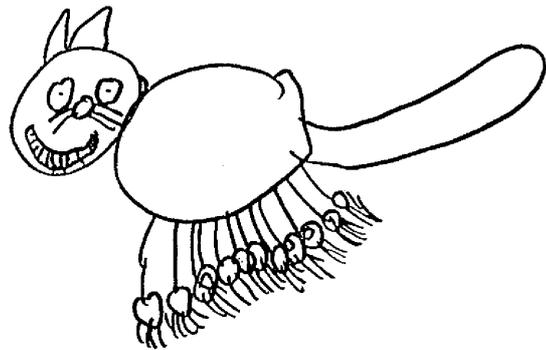
The Foster Carer's Handbook

For carers of children 11 years and under

Fourth edition

Ann Wheal with Meral Mehmet

Brendan drew our cat. He was at the Willows Nursery School in Portsmouth. He drew the cat from one side. He went round the other side and could still see four legs so he drew four more. He then went to the front and could still see four legs. He finally gave up and decided the cat was having kittens.



Children have different ways of seeing



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We are always keen to receive feedback on publications and new ideas for future projects.

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This book is dedicated to

Jamie Bray

who died so tragically on July 13th 2010, aged 9 years

Background

In 1992 the Division of Social Work at the University of Southampton undertook a research project which became known as 'The Dolphin Project'. During the project, the researchers met young people aged 11-18 who were being looked after in Birmingham, Berkshire and Hampshire. The young people talked about what they knew about the Children Act and also spoke about their time in children's homes and in foster care. The researchers also met the carers.

The Foster Carer's Handbook, now in its 4th edition, is one of the many outcomes of this report and continues successfully today.

For organisations wishing to combine this book with locally produced materials a loose-leaf version is available (see page xiv for full details).

There is a similar book for young people 12 and older published by Russell House Publishing. It has been published in three previous editions, but the 4th edition (2012) is called *The Teenager's Foster Carer's Handbook: caring for young people in foster and residential care and helping them to become adults*.

Both these books seek to discourage unfair discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, disability (including use of sign language) race, ethnic origin, nationality, sexuality, social class, religion or language.

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We would also like to especially thank our husbands Peter and Kemal for their help, patience and guidance.

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Loose leaf version

We have found that many organisations want to provide their carers with the information contained in this book but also wish to add local details, procedures and forms. To help with this, we can supply *The Foster Carer's Handbook* as loose-leaf sets which you can incorporate with your own materials in your own folders to form a comprehensive resource pack for local use.

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Section 1

Introduction

This handbook has been produced primarily for foster carers but it also has useful information for those working in residential care. It is aimed at those who are looking after children aged approximately 11 years and under.

The handbook aims to ensure that we always keep the interests of children as our focus – and this includes listening to children. In most cases children should live within their family or with close friends. Fostering or residential care should only be considered when absolutely necessary.

The book also aims to:

- Encourage carers to work in partnership with the children's families.
- Enable children to return to their families' homes as soon as possible, if appropriate.
- Encourage carers to meet a broad range of children's needs and so help them face the future with confidence.



How to use this handbook

It is not possible to learn to become a good carer by reading a book. This book should be used as **a guide, referred to as necessary or dipped into when a particular topic arises**.

It has been developed:

- For carers to read and use themselves.
- For carers to read and use with their children.
- To help carers answer the many questions children 11 years and under may ask about their time 'being looked after'.
- To help carers understand how and when to make appropriate decisions for those they care for.
- To be used as a 'talking tool' when carers are working in partnership with children. In this way it is hoped the children, as they become adults, will learn to take responsibility for their own futures.
- To be used as supervision tool by the foster carer and their supervising social worker and can be used for training or to show an understanding of fostering.

The handbook can also be used with your own children who will find some of the information and ideas offered helpful. It is important that your own children understand the responsibilities of fostering, such as issues of confidentiality. At the same time, it is essential that they are listened to and included in many of the decisions made that will affect them as well as the children placed with you. The book contains many topics that may be used as a way to start talking with children about issues beyond the home. Some people think that if a child is given too much information it may be misused. Our experience points to the reverse. The more information children have, the more successfully they will be able to plan their lives as children and their future lives as adults.

Most sections of the handbook have at least one 'activity'. Depending on the child's age and ability, the carer can either work through the activity with the child, or let them do it on their own, and discuss the results afterwards, if the child wishes. The activities, (games, checklists, forms and pictures) may be photocopied without further permission.

! Some of the terms in the book may vary from region to region, however the overriding principles are the same.

Everyone needs to be valued, to feel special, and to feel important. By treating all children as individuals, working with and caring for them, a carer will build up a child's self esteem. Quite often, it is the small things that one does or doesn't do that have the greatest impact on the child. For example, at one time there was much publicity about the practice of using black plastic sacks to transport a child's property and treasured possessions from one house to the next. This practice, which shows a total lack of respect for the child and their belongings, has, hopefully now stopped. Frank Dobson, a Minister of Health in the 1990s, once suggested that when thinking about looked after children, we should ask ourselves, 'is it good enough for my child?'

All practice should be based on ensuring *'it is good enough for my child'*. We hope this book will help.

**A good carer is someone who sits down and listens to you
and discusses things with you.**

A young person's view

Standards in foster care

The way England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been devolved over the past years has resulted in variations on the way each country takes responsibility for social care. This has led to some marked differences, and one such is in the requirement to work with nationally proscribed standards. Please refer specifically to the website for each country's government department for more details. BAAF and the Fostering Network also work across the four countries, and are able to give more details.

Although there are differences in detail, the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all require that carers:

- Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
- Understand their role as a foster carer.
- Understand health and safety and health care.
- Know how to communicate effectively with children.
- Understand the development of children and young people.
- Know how to keep children and young people safe from harm.
- Know the importance of self-development.

The aim of this book is to:

- Help all carers achieve the expectations placed on them and maintain standards.
- Underline and encourage the use of relevant government standards.
- Give examples of good practice.