

ADVICE FOR CARERS WISHING TO ATTEND RETREATS

Overnight stays for children in OOHC

This updated advice for carers is offered in the hope that it will make clear to kinship carers that the rules around overnight stays for children in OOHC are manageable. KCV hopes that carers think about using overnight stays so that they are enabled to attend retreats.

Staying overnight somewhere other than home is an important social activity for children which supports the development of relationships. The policy and approach outlined below applies to kinship care placements of children over four years old that are subject to:

- a long-term care order
- care by Secretary order
- family reunification order
- interim accommodation order.

This policy applies to overnight stays of up to two consecutive nights. Longer overnight stays require the approval of the child's case manager, who will determine any additional conditions for approval of the longer stay on a case-by-case basis. This policy does not change current requirements in relation to decision making, planning, approvals, and checks for changes of placement or respite care.

In general, if there is a request for a child or young person in out-of-home care to stay overnight with a friend, the decision to allow or not allow the overnight stay may be made without the need for

police checks on the adults in the household where the child or young person is to stay.

For children under four years old, in practice it is considered unlikely that they would stay overnight with friends without their carer. Therefore, any requests for children under four years old to stay overnight need to be considered carefully.

On all occasions of the first overnight stay with a particular friend, the decision is to be made by the carer in collaboration with the case worker. On subsequent stays with the friend, provided there were no issues with the previous stay, and with the agreement of the case manager, the carer may make the decision to allow the stay without the need to consult each time. Case planners can also authorise carers to make decisions about overnight stays after a first overnight stay under s. 175B of the CYFA. However, carers must continue to advise the CSO case worker, case manager or unit manager in the case of residential care, of the overnight stay before the stay occurs.

Carer tasks/checklist

Consult the CSO case worker or case manager (DFFH or contracted CSO) or, if in residential care, the unit supervisor or case manager (DFFH or contracted CSO) when deciding whether a child or young person should stay overnight at a friend's house for the first time with that friend.

On each occasion that you decide whether an overnight stay should proceed, consider the following:

- What is the purpose of the visit?
- What are the child or young person's wishes? Do they wish to stay overnight?
- Is the child sufficiently independent and settled to be separated from the carer overnight?
- Has the child or young person previously stayed overnight with the family before entering this placement and was it a positive experience?
- What is the age, level of understanding and the vulnerability of the child or young person?
- Does the child or young person know the friend well? Have they spent time at the home or with the family?
- Does the child or young person know the friend's parents/carers and are they comfortable with the friend/ family?
- Who will be supervising the child or young person during the visit?
- What are the sleeping arrangements and are they appropriate?
- Does the carer know the friend and their family?
- Does the carer know who will be staying at the friend's home that night?
- Are there any reasonable grounds for concern that the child or young person may be at risk of harm in the household concerned, or from the activities proposed during the visit?
- Are there any reasonable grounds for concern that the child or young person may, through their own behaviour, put themselves or others at risk of harm in the household concerned?
- Is the child staying in the household with another child or young person, rather than staying solely with adult/s
- Are there any cultural issues that need to be considered?
- Is the request reasonable at this stage of the placement?
- Are there any other reasons (such as an interrupted night's sleep or illness) that would make the stay difficult for the child or young person?

If the child is a pre-schooler, the following additional questions should be considered:

- Does the person have experience looking after children of this age group?
- Does this person know how to appropriately comfort the child?

A police check is not required on the adults of the household where the overnight stay will occur.

Staff and carers have a duty of care towards the child to act reasonably in all circumstances. This means staff and carers should consider the issues outlined in this procedure aimed at ensuring the safety and protection of the child or young person in their care during an overnight stay where the carer is not present.

Carers should act in a way that a good parent would act in deciding whether their child should stay overnight with a friend.

If, after the assessment process, you and the CSO case worker or case manager decide that an overnight stay is not appropriate, explain to the child or young person the rationale for not allowing the stay.

If the overnight stay is to proceed, consider what information the person caring for the child or young person overnight needs to know and provide that information to them, while also being mindful of the child or young person's privacy.

You may need to tell the person about:

- likes and dislikes
- routines (such as bedtime and meals)
- cultural considerations (such as food, dress and customs)
- fears or phobias (such as fear of the dark, water or animals)
- swimming proficiency (if relevant to activities)
- medical needs (such as medications or allergies)
- behaviours (such as bed wetting) and the management of these behaviours
- details of how to contact the carer during the period of the stay and a back-up contact.

Contact the parents of the friend prior to the visit occurring to confirm the arrangements for an overnight stay. Do not rely on advice from the child or young person in your care or the child or young person's friend.

Discuss the following arrangements with the parents of the child's friend:

- relevant information about the child or young person's needs (as noted above)
- arrangements and times for 'drop off' and 'pick up'
- relevant information or resources needed by the child or young person for activities during the overnight stay (including money, appropriate clothing, or swimming costume)
- contact details for the household in which the child or young person is staying
- your contact details, or the contact details of the residential unit
- how the child can contact the carer in case the child or young person feels unhappy or unsafe during the stay.

After the overnight stay, talk with the child or young person about how the overnight stay went.

Give feedback to the CSO case worker or case manager (DFFH or contracted CSO) about the overnight stay, advising:

- whether the child or young person had a positive experience and any comments she or he made
- any issues or concerns that need to be addressed
- any plans for another overnight stay in the future.

If the case manager provides approval, or if the case planner authorises the carer under s. 175B of the CYFA, the carer can decide whether subsequent overnight stays with the friend can occur without the need for consultation with a CSO case worker, unit manager or case manager. However, it is wise to advise the CSO case worker or the case manager prior to any overnight stay.