

Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for 'Mainstream' Foster Carers in Wales

Note on Language: Understanding the Term 'Mainstream' Foster Carers

For consistency and clarity, we use 'Mainstream' Foster Carers throughout this document. This wording is used to describe a foster carer who is not related or connected to the child in their care and has been assessed and approved to care to a range of children in accordance with the terms of their approval and matching processes. 'Kinship' Foster Carers (also sometimes referred to as 'Connected Persons' Foster Carers or 'Family and Friends' Foster Carers) are assessed and approved to care for children who have an existing familial or significant personal relationship with the child that they care for.

Guidance

The skills and qualities for mainstream foster carers in Wales are designed as a guide to help fostering services make suitability recommendations and understand where current or potential mainstream foster carers may need support. They highlight what is important in the role of a mainstream foster carer in Wales, but they are not a checklist for approval decisions and should not be used in isolation from other factors that contribute to decision making.

Where gaps are identified in relation to particular competencies this should prompt an analysis of the carer's support and development needs, including the extent to which these needs can be addressed through training, supervision and on-going support from the fostering service. Consideration should also be given to the foster carer's capacity to develop and sustain the required competencies over time.

The Framework should therefore support professional judgement about the fostering assessment (Coram BAAF Form F or equivalent) as well as the carer's on-going ability to meet the needs and expectations of the fostering role over time for example as part of the annual review, to support reflection on practice or evidence on-going development.

These competencies sit alongside those developed for kinship foster carers. While the core expectations are broadly the same, reflecting the shared regulatory framework applicable to all approved foster carers, there are differences in language and emphasis to reflect the distinct context of kinship care.

The evidence matrix can be used to show where each of the skills and qualities has been demonstrated in the assessment or review report and the plan to support the foster carers to develop the skills and qualities necessary to meet the needs of children in care.

If there are significant concerns about a current or potential foster carer's ability to develop or maintain these skills and qualities, and a support and development plan would not be enough to help

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them do so, this may be a factor in deciding not to recommend their approval or continued approval as a foster carer.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children must remain the paramount consideration for foster practice, and the competency framework should support the assessment and development of the foster carer's ability to meet these responsibilities as a priority.

The competency framework has been informed by:

- The Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales
- The Local Authority Fostering Services Code of Practice 2019
- The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018 (as amended 2026)
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (as amended 2026)
- Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians: Learning from Case Reviews 2007–2019, Hedy Cleaver and Wendy Rose, Coram BAAF, 2020
- CoramBAAF Form F: Prospective Foster Carer Report and Competency Framework 2020
- CoramBAAF Form F: Prospective Foster Carer Report 2026

Competency Framework:

The Skills and Qualities for Mainstream Foster Carers in Wales

1. Caring for the Child(ren)

1.1 Providing good care

An ability to give the child good care that helps, protects and promotes their safety and well-being in accordance with the child's care and support plan. This involves supporting them to reach their potential in all areas of their life which includes meeting their emotional, mental, physical, health, educational, leisure, social, identity, cultural, religious, social or spiritual development needs. The foster carer should promote a sense of belonging ensuring the child feels safe, valued and included in family life.

1.2 Understanding the child's wishes and feelings and prioritising their needs

Foster carers should be able to listen to the child's wishes and feelings and take account of these in decisions that affect them. Should show insight into the child's feelings of being looked after, responding with sensitivity and empathy to feelings of confusion and loss.

1.3 Helping with separation, loss and/or trauma

An ability to understand how any difficult experiences, trauma and disruption may affect the child's behaviour, now and in the future. They should be able to care for them in a way that helps them feel safe and supported, providing a stable family environment which will promote secure attachments for the child. This involves following the child's care and support plan, following advice given by the team working with the child and asking for advice when needed.

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1.4 **Working with the child's family**

Foster carers need to be able to work with people who are important to the child in line with the child's care and support plan. This could be the child's parents, other relatives, or other foster carers. This includes supporting family time (contact) when it is part of the child's care and support plan.

1.5 **Setting boundaries and responding to behaviour**

Foster carers need the ability to set clear rules and limits for the child in a fair way that accounts for their developmental needs. They must be able to guide their behaviour without using physical punishment or harsh treatment. Any behaviour management they use must follow the policies of the fostering service.

1.6 **Understanding child development**

An ability to understand the child's age and stage of development. They should be able to listen to the child and communicate with them in a way that matches their age and level of understanding as they grow.

1.7 **Preparing for adulthood**

Foster carers need to be able to help the child learn the skills they need to become independent and ready for adult life. These skills are developed throughout a child's life, in line with their age and stage of development and should support them to reach their potential and be prepared for the future.

2. **Providing a Safe and Caring Environment**

2.1 **Keeping the child safe**

An ability to provide a home where the child is safe and feels safe and where they are protected from harm or abuse. Children growing up in foster care may need extra support in this area if their past experiences have meant they find it more difficult to understand risk and safety. Foster carers need to demonstrate the ability to care for them in a way that helps them to feel safe supporting safer caring practices for all individuals within the home and their wider network who will be in contact with the child.

2.2 **Understanding vulnerability**

Foster carers should be aware of any special risks or vulnerabilities the child might face because of disability, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or care experience and be able to help them to overcome, manage or reduce any associated risks, vulnerabilities or stigma depending on their individual needs.

2.3 **Teaching the child to stay safe**

Children growing up in foster care may need extra support to help them recognise risky or harmful situations particularly if past experiences have meant they find it more difficult to understand risk and safety. Foster carers need the ability to support the child with their understanding as they grow in a way that accounts for their needs and experiences.

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2.4 Understanding family risks

Foster Carers need to understand any risks linked to the child's family and be able to protect them from these risks by following the care plan and working with the other professionals involved in the child's plan.

2.5 Handling pressure

Foster carers need to be able to seek help and support from their fostering service and/or the child's social worker if they feel pressure from family members or others to go against the child's care and support plan.

3. Working as Part of a Team

3.1 Working with practitioners/other professionals

An ability to work with social workers and other practitioners/professionals to support the child and make plans for them. Adhering to the policies of the fostering service, participating in meetings, supporting visits and any other expectations in relation to the child's care.

3.2 Understanding their role

Foster carers need to demonstrate an understanding of the responsibilities and expectations of the foster carer role, including the requirements of the Foster Carer Agreement and Delegated Authority Agreement.

3.3 Good communication

Foster Carers need to be able to communicate effectively with children, practitioners and others involved in the child's care. An ability to share information in a clear and timely way that helps to build positive relationships and work collaboratively to meet the child's needs.

3.4 Keeping information private

An ability to keep personal information about the child and their family private and follow the confidentiality guidance and policies of the fostering service.

4. Wellbeing, support and development

4.1 Understanding how fostering affects them

Foster carers need the ability to think about how life experiences affect themselves, their family and their role as a foster carer. It is important that foster carers understand the impact that fostering may have on themselves and their family and can talk about the impact with the fostering service so that support can be provided.

4.2 Using community support

An ability to use sources of support and other resources in their community and local area if needed to support the child and meet any specific needs identified in the child's plan.

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4.3 **Learning and development**

An ability to use opportunities to develop knowledge or skills that would help to meet the child's needs or to prepare for meeting their needs as they grow and to utilise the fostering service learning and development opportunities to support with this.

4.4 **Managing stress and sustaining relationships**

Foster carers need to be able to continue to care for the child and meet their needs through times of challenge or stress in their own lives. This includes sustaining relationships with the child, any important people in the child's life, the fostering service and any other workers involved in meeting the child's needs.

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Evidence Matrix Competency Framework: Skills and Qualities for Mainstream Foster Carers in Wales		F/S/N*	Where:
1. Caring for the child(ren)			
1.1	Providing good care		
1.2	Understanding the child's wishes and feelings and prioritising their needs		
1.3	Helping with separation, loss and/or trauma		
1.4	Working with the child's family		
1.5	Setting boundaries and responding to behaviour		
1.6	Understanding child development		
1.7	Preparing for adulthood		
2. Providing a safe and caring environment:			
2.1	Keeping the child safe		
2.2	Understanding vulnerability		
2.3	Teaching the child to stay safe		
2.4	Understanding family risks		
2.5	Handling pressure		
3. Working as part of a team:			
3.1	Working with practitioners/other professionals		
3.2	Understanding of role		
3.3	Good communication		
3.4	Keeping information private		
4. Wellbeing, support and development:			
4.1	Understanding the impact of fostering		
4.2	Using community support		
4.3	Learning and development		
4.4	Managing stress and sustaining relationships		

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*Key: F= Fully; S = Support needed; N – Not evidenced or cannot be met

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