

KENT SHARED LIVES

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(31) Supporting Adults to have Safe Friendships and Relationships

Kent Shared Lives recognises the importance that friendships and relationships have to all of us. Shared Lives is committed to ensuring that people in Shared Lives placements have the same opportunity as any other member of the community to develop a range of valued friendships and relationships including intimate relationships.

One of the most important roles of a Shared Lives host is to support the people placed with them to make friends, develop and keep relationships and maintain family links.

This policy covers the Shared Lives hosts responsibility in this area as well as Shared Lives responsibility to ensure that Shared Lives hosts have the skills and knowledge to carry out their role sensitively, effectively and safely. Shared Lives is also responsible for ensuring that Shared Lives hosts understand the complex legislative framework within which they are working and their role in protecting individuals from exploitation and abuse.

Underlying Principles

One of the key aims of any Shared Lives placement is to support the person in the placement to live as ordinary a life as possible. People in Shared Lives placements should be encouraged and given the opportunity to form friendships and relationships with a range of other people. These friendships and relationships will develop through their day-to-day contact with people in different settings.

The vulnerability of some of the individuals living in Shared Lives places a responsibility on Shared Lives hosts to try and ensure that these relationships are safe and free from possible exploitation. In order to achieve this, Shared Lives hosts will be expected to be alert to any potential risks involved for the individual when seeing particular friends/family members and take steps to support the individual to minimise these risks. This will often be done with close advice and guidance from the funding social care team of the individual who, wherever possible, should identify any risks in the individual's needs assessment/care and support plan. Agreed decisions regarding the management of these risks in the Shared Lives placement should be recorded in the care and support plan.

This should not be done in a way that breaches the individuals right to privacy and respect and should, where possible, involve the individual in considering the degree of risk their friendships and relationships could pose.

Shared Lives hosts and social workers/case officer must ensure individuals have the information and guidance they need to make choices about their relationships. For example a referral to the Learning Disability nurse.

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However, even with this information some individuals may choose to have contact with friends and family about which hosts may feel uncomfortable.

Legislative Context

People have the right to form a friendship with whomever they please. There are very few legal powers to prevent a friendship between an individual and another person.

There is however legislation which both Shared Lives and the hosts need to take account of which is intended to give greater protection to individuals from sexual exploitation and abuse

[Sex Offenders Act 2003](#)

Shared Lives is committed to enabling individuals to have the opportunity to lead a real life and will support the right of individuals to make informed choices about their own lives. Shared Lives also recognises the vulnerability of Shared Lives hosts in operating as 'lone workers. Shared Lives will seek to provide the training and support needed to enable Shared Lives hosts both to have 'safe' relationships with adults and to be competent in fulfilling the important Shared Lives host role they have in supporting adults to be able to develop the friendships and relationships that will enable them to give and to be valued.

Procedure

1. Shared Lives will ensure, through training and explanation that the Shared Lives host, understands their role in supporting the people placed with them to have friendships and relationships and the complex legislative framework within which they are working.
2. Shared Lives will request that the individual care and support plan gives guidance to the Shared Lives host on the support that they are expected to give to the person placed with them to enable them to maintain family links and have a range of friendships and relationships.
3. Shared Lives will ensure that the Shared Lives host understands the steps that they should take if they have concerns about a relationship that the person placed with them has developed.
These are:
 - 3.1 The Shared Lives host should talk to the person placed with them and explain their concerns. This is a difficult balancing act as the Shared Lives host has a duty to protect the person placed with them from exploitation or abuse but must also bear in mind the right of the individual to have friendships and relationships of their choice. The Shared Lives host should be careful not to put undue or unfair pressure on the person to end that relationship. The Human Rights Act 1998 protects the right to privacy and respect for family life, home and correspondence and to freedom of association with others.
 - 3.2 If the Shared Lives host continues to have concerns, he/she should explain that to the individual. The Shared Lives host should discuss

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continuing concerns with the Shared Lives worker in order to understand their basis and agree a strategy.

- 3.3 The Shared Lives worker and host should consult the social care funding team who may decide the matter should be properly considered at a formal review involving the individual and his/her representative. The meeting will consider the concerns and agree a way forward. This may involve a risk assessment and the agreement of a formal risk management strategy. The care and support plan should if necessary be amended so that the Shared Lives host has clear instructions about their role and what they should be doing to support and safeguard.
- 3.4 If at any time a Shared Lives host is concerned that an individual is involved in an abusive friendship or relationship they should immediately inform the Shared Lives worker. Shared Lives will then follow the procedure for safeguarding and raise with the funding social care team.