

FOSTERING SERVICE GUIDANCE in relation to DANGEROUS PETS

This guide should be read in conjunction with the CoramBAAF publication - *Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption (2020)*

Introduction

Some pets, such as dangerous dogs or venomous reptiles or insects, are incompatible with fostering. To establish if this is the case, a thorough assessment of any animals in the household should be made.

If an applicant owns, or an existing carer acquires, a dog that has been banned by the Dangerous Dog Act, then **they will not be able to foster a child**.

The law

The **Dangerous Dogs Act 1991** [as amended 1997 and 2014] prohibits all households from the keeping of certain breeds. Currently banned breeds are:

- Pit Bull Terrier
- Japanese Tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro
- American XL Bully breed*

*On 1st February 2024 the law changed to include this breed of dog.

Anyone who had a dog of this breed before the law changed should have applied for a certificate of exemption - the deadline was 31st January.

If a foster carer did not get an exemption certificate in time then they are acting illegally by owning an unregistered dangerous dog. They should immediately inform their local police force. For more information see:

[American Bully XL ban: what owners need to know | Dogs Trust](#)

[Ban on XL Bully dogs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Where **snakes and reptiles, insects, or arachnids (spiders) are venomous** then safety is obviously of crucial importance. Keeping venomous animals requires registration under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and the law requires prospective owners of such species to be carefully inspected before they are granted a licence. Anyone wishing to keep an animal covered by the Act 1976 must apply for a licence from their local authority with strict conditions in order to keep them.

The person granting the licence will also be involved in considering whether this is compatible with fostering [and adoption].

Fostering Assessment and Reviews

The same LCS Form **Pet Questionnaire** is used for both assessments and, where necessary, reviews. This is a standard assessment tool and all pets should be included, not just dogs.

In some circumstances a **specialist dog assessment** may be needed. In deciding whether to do this in a particular case, this needs to be a proportionate response as a result of specific identified concerns around safety.

This might include factors such as the breed of dog, history of behaviour (including an absence of history e.g. with some rescue dogs), or because information has arisen in the standard pet assessment.

Where there is any uncertainty, the service should err on the side of caution and request that the specialist assessment is undertaken to satisfy themselves that children in care will be safe. Responsibility for commissioning (paying) for the assessment will be agreed on a case by case basis.

Social Workers should be aware that **more than one dog can be defined as a pack**. Some fostering services specify two dogs, others three and may not accept applications from a household with a pack of dogs.

In Suffolk, the decision on the number of dogs permitted in a fostering household would be dependent on their behaviour and other factors, which are assessed in the required Pet Questionnaire (LCS) and via a specialist assessment if required.

In the case of **venomous reptiles, insects and spiders**, safety must be fully assessed in relation to how and where they are kept and how the carers handle them. It is also important to consider risk in relation to large powerful snakes such as boa constrictors or pythons where the danger comes from risk of constriction rather than a bite.

From a **health perspective**, consideration must be given to the risk of **salmonella from reptiles** and **psittacosis from certain birds** such as parrots, budgerigars etc.

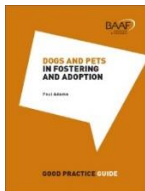
Children are particularly at risk as they may like to handle and stroke pet reptiles or birds. They may also become infected from animal droppings if the pet is allowed to roam freely around the home or, in the case of psittacosis, it can be transmitted through inhalation of dried faeces or feather dust. The CoramBAAF guide offers various measures that can be taken to ensure everyone in the household is protected.

An additional consideration when assessing pets in a (prospective or existing) fostering household is **how the animal is kept and treated**. It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to fail to provide for the welfare needs of an animal. This is punishable with a maximum penalty of 6 months imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. This law is under review with a proposal to increase the penalty to up to 5 years imprisonment.

Mistreatment includes not providing a kept wild animal such as a primate or reptile with an appropriate environment. Ill treatment of any animal can lead to dangerous, aggressive behaviours which adds an additional risk.

Where a social worker comes across a situation of neglect or other mistreatment, careful consideration must be given to reporting the case to the RSPCA or Police.

RESOURCES



Adams, P. (2020) CoramBAAF - *Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption*

[Keeping animals under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act - Defra in the media \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/keeping-animals-under-the-dangerous-wild-animals-act)

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/petsfactsheetseptember2019.pdf>

Version Control

Version	Amendments/Updates	Date