

Allegations against Foster Carers – Carer's Handbook Summary

Facing a serious concern or allegation is a stressful time for foster carers and their families. It is acknowledged that there are times when children and young people make false allegations, but some foster carers do abuse children. For this reason any allegation made by a child must be taken seriously and investigated to ensure they are protected from harm.

Where an allegation is made regarding a foster carer who is half of a couple, both carers will be considered in respect of the allegations management process and decision making.

If an allegation is made regarding the carer outside of their work with children, and this may present a risk of harm to a child or young person for whom the foster carer has responsibility, the same procedures will be followed.

Allegations will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively involving open and honest communication with and support to all those affected.

Expectations placed on Children's' Services

The expectation placed on the Fostering Service and Care Management is that:

- At the time of a child's placement, foster carers will be provided with detailed information as to the child's background and in particular the context of any abusive experiences of and/or previous allegations made by the child;
- All foster carers will receive preparation, training and guidance to help them provide a safe environment for the child and all members of the foster family;
- All foster carers will have received information about this procedure and the West Yorkshire Consortium Safeguarding Procedures;

Expectations placed on foster carers

The Fostering Service expects that:

- Foster carers protect children from harm, including abuse, accidents, bullying or negative attitudes and to operate within a safeguarding culture and ethos.
- Carers will provide a high standard of care and commitment to fostered children.
- The ability to model and promote positive behaviour and manage children's needs is central to the quality of care provided. Negative behaviour should be managed through building positive relationships with children, diffusing difficult situations that arise and avoiding escalation of negativity or conflict.
- All foster carers will be familiar with and adopt the Fostering Service procedures for recording the progress of children placed with them, including any incidents or complaints, and understand that these procedures have been made to protect all

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those involved in the child's placement, particularly at times of high stress, and will provide important evidence if an allegation is made.

3. Stage 1 concerns regarding foster carer practice

A Stage 1 concern is defined as where an issue has been identified regarding foster carer practice. This will usually be addressed within a 'Review of Concerns' between the supervising social worker and foster carer. The supervising social worker's line manager may also be involved.

4. Stage 2 concerns regarding foster carer practice

Continued, returning or serious concerns identified in carer practice would be viewed as being at Stage 2 and are likely to result in the decision to undertake a 'Management Review'. Carers will be informed of the nature of the concern, the support available, and where possible the date of the planned management review.

The supervising social worker will write a 'Signs of Safety' report outlining their concerns, the positive aspects of the placement and their recommendation as to what should happen. This report and any supporting evidence, will be provided to the management review. Carers will be given ten working days to read the report and respond.

The management review is chaired by the fostering reviewing officer (FRO) who will also write a 'Signs of Safety' report after the meeting. The FRO report may agree with the views of the supervising social worker and team manager or make other recommendations. A decision will be made following the management review as to whether the matter will be taken to the Fostering Panel.

5. Stage 3 allegations against foster carers

These allegations fall under Standard 22.1 of the National Minimum Standards 2011 regarding the handling of allegations and suspicions of harm where a person may have:

- "a. Behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child*
- b. Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child*
- or*
- c. Behaved towards a child in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children".*

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These allegations will be dealt with according to the West Yorkshire Consortium (Allegations Management) Safeguarding Procedures:

<http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com>

Where there is need to investigate an allegation, the carer will be advised of this as soon as possible and asked if they wish for a referral to be made to FISS (Foster carer Independent Support Service) for support. Carers will receive subsequent confirmation that this is a safeguarding concern in writing, together with the name of the supervising social worker who will investigate the allegation and confirmation of FISS support if they have chosen this.

The investigating SSW will interview the foster carer and write a 'Signs of Safety' report. Carers will be given ten working days to read the report and respond. The investigating SSW's involvement ends once they have written this report.

A management review will be convened and chaired by the fostering reviewing officer. The fostering reviewing officer will also produce a 'Signs of Safety' report that may agree with or challenge the original SSW's report. Again, carers will have ten working days to read and respond.

A decision will be taken as to whether the case is progressed to Fostering Panel. Where it does go to Panel, the reports and any responses will be considered and recommendations made to the agency decision maker who holds the authority for the final decision.

6. Time-scales

In order to minimise process 'drift', foster carers will be offered two possible management review dates and should either choose one or provide a suitable alternative themselves. If foster carers chose to withdraw from the process or resign, the concerns or allegations management process will continue to final ADM decision.