

Safeguarding Children: Dealing With Allegations Supporting Foster Carers

Good Practice in dealing with allegations

Being under investigation is always stressful, but agencies can help by:

- Minimising Delay
- Providing you with written information
- Being open and honest
- Ensuring access to independent support

If you are unhappy about the way you have been treated by the Fostering Service, you are able to complain. If you are unhappy about the way the investigation was conducted, you should contact the Local Authority's Complaints Officer.

Contact Details

Complaints Officer

01472 326427

Experience shows that children can be subjected to abuse by those who are supposed to be caring for them. It is essential that children do not feel inhibited from reporting abuse against them by staff or volunteers. Children have a right to be treated properly and any incident where a child or adult feels that a trusted adult has crossed the boundary of acceptable behaviour should be reported. All individuals who work with children must ensure that the environment they work or live in encourages children to make truthful reports of unacceptable behaviour.

Dealing With an Allegation

This leaflet aims to provide information to those who foster children, about what happens if an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against them. It also provides information about other situations where there is a concern about the boundaries of acceptable behaviour with a child.

Becoming the subject of an allegation is always stressful for the foster carer concerned and for their family. The challenge for everyone concerned is to ensure that children and affectively safeguarded and that their welfare is promoted, whilst at the same time treating foster carers accused, fairly and honestly.

What Happens When an Allegation is Made?

When an allegation is made about a foster carer, the carer is likely to feel stressed and may also feel aggrieved. The Fostering Service must refer the matter to the Local Authority's Designated Officer whose role it is to offer advice in these circumstances and monitor what happens.

The Local Authority's Designated Officer will discuss the concerns with the Fostering Service and the Child's Social Work Team. If the concerns are of a serious nature, they will make a referral to the Police under Section 47 and a strategy meeting held. If they are less serious, information sharing under Section 17 may be advised.

North East Lincolnshire's Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) provides detailed guidance to all agencies about the procedures to be followed, for Section 47 and Section 17 enquiries. Your link worker will provide you with a copy of this guidance on request.

What form does the enquiry take?

There are 3 related, but separate sets of enquiries which need to take place. Each differs in terms of focus and can have different outcomes. The 3 types of enquiries are:

- Child Protection Enquiries – relating to the safety and welfare of any children who are or who may have been involved;
- A Police investigation into a possible offence;
- Fostering Review Procedures; where it appears to be appropriate a review will always be carried out when the above enquiries are complete.

The Fostering Service will aim to inform you about the existence of the allegation as soon as they receive it. However, they may not be able to do this until after they have consulted with other agencies. In most circumstances, you could expect to be informed of the substance of the allegation within 3 days of the Fostering Service receiving it.

What happens if everyone thinks the allegation is serious?

Children's Services and the Police will hold a strategy meeting to agree what type of enquiries will need to take place and what is required to safeguard any children involved. You will not be part of the strategy meeting, although your link worker will usually be involved. In serious cases the Local Authority's Designated Officer will ensure that the person undertaking the enquiry is not known to you and that he/she is able to be independent.

How will I know what has been decided?

The Fostering Service will keep you informed of what type of enquiries will be carried out and the expected timescales. You can expect to be treated fairly, be informed verbally and in writing about the nature of the concerns and be informed of all decisions as soon as possible. It is usual practice for the professionals involved to review the progress of any prolonged investigation regularly. Lesser concerns should be dealt with, within 14 days.

Where can I get independent support from?

Independent support can be a great help and benefit to you. You may be able to contact some of the following:

- Fostering Network Helpline
- Independent Support Organised by the Fostering Service
- Your Fostering Link Worker
- General Practitioner

Will I be suspended from fostering while enquiries are ongoing?

Generally this will not happen automatically, or without careful thought. The strategy group will need to consider if there is cause to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, or if the allegation warrants a Police investigation or if the concerns are so serious that it might be grounds for de-registration as a foster carer. Your fostering payments may be affected depending on your circumstances.

Will details of the investigation be kept on my fostering records or shared with anyone else?

It is important that the Fostering Service keeps a summary of any allegations made, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, any actions taken and decisions reached on a person's confidential file. However, a copy of information which is kept on file about you will be available to you.

The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be available to the Fostering Service, for inspection by Ofsted or given in response to any future requests for references and provide classification in cases where a future Criminal Record Check reveals information from Police that an allegation was made but did not result in a prosecution or conviction.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board will keep a record of all allegations against persons working with children for monitoring purposes. They will hold personal information, the nature of the allegation and the outcome. This information will be stored securely in line with the Data Protection