

Experience shows that children can be abused and harmed 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 professionals, staff or volunteers. Children have a right to be treated properly and any incident where a child or adult feels that a person in a position of trust has crossed the boundary of acceptable behaviour, should be reported.

All individuals who work with children must ensure that the environment in which they work or live supports and encourages children and adults to make honest reports of unacceptable behaviour.

Contact Details

Local Authority Complaints Officer

feedback@nelincs.gov.uk

01472 326427/01472326426

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, as the Link Worker, are unhappy about the way the Foster Carer 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.

North East Lincolnshire Local Safeguarding Partnership

Safeguarding Children: Foster Link Workers Advise for those supporting Foster Carers when dealing with allegations

Dealing with an Allegation

This leaflet aims to provide information to Foster Link Workers working with Foster Carers who may have had an allegation 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 are affectively safeguarded and their welfare promoted, whilst at the same time treating the 'accused' foster carer fairly and honestly.

What Happens When an Allegation is made?

If an allegation is made about the 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 and a strategy meeting will be held. If the allegations are less serious, information sharing, with Children's Services only may be advised.

North East Lincolnshire's Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) provides detailed guidance to all agencies about the procedures to be followed. You, as a Link Worker, are required to provide the Foster Carer with a copy of any 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 should aim to inform the Foster Carer about the existence of the allegation as soon as they receive it. However, they may not be able to do this until after having consulted with other agencies. In most circumstances, the Foster Care can 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 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. The Foster Carer will not be part of the strategy meeting, although you as 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 the Foster Carer and that he or she is able to be independent.

How will the Foster Care know what has been decided?

The Fostering Service will keep the Foster Carer informed of what type of enquiries will be carried out and the expected timescales. The Foster Carer 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 up to its conclusion or resolution. Lesser concerns should be dealt with, within 14 days.

Where can the Foster Carers get independent support from?

Independent support can be a great help and benefit to the Foster Carer. They may be able to contact some of the following:

- Fostering Network Helpline
- Independent Support Organised by the Fostering Service
- Fostering Link Workers. BAAF, NFCA
- General Practitioner

Will the Foster Carer be suspended from fostering while enquiries are ongoing?

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

Will details of the Investigation be kept on their fostering records or shared with anyone else?

It is important that the Fostering Service keeps a summary of any allegations made, details of how it was followed up and resolved, and any actions taken or decisions reached. These should be kept on the Foster Carer's confidential file. However, a copy of information kept on file about the Foster Carer will be available to them on request.

The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be available to the Fostering Service, for inspection by Ofsted or to be provided in response to any future requests for references. It also provides 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 Safeguarding Children Partnership 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 Act requirements.