



Whistleblowing Policy

We are fully committed to carrying out the services provided by AFA with integrity and respect, and we expect all staff, freelance workers, Panel Members, carers and consultants to be familiar with, and maintain, our high standards. However, there is always the potential for things to go wrong in any organisation, and AFA works in a culture of openness and accountability to prevent such situations occurring and to address them if they do.

This policy aims to encourage those who suspect any wrongdoing to report it as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated fully and their confidentiality will be respected.

The law allows members of staff to make a 'protected disclosure' in relation to certain types of serious concern. For it to be classed as 'protected', a disclosure must relate to a specific subject matter and be made in a way that is proportionate to the concerns.

Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or risks at work that affect others. These may include:

- criminal activity;
- miscarriages of justice;
- danger to health and safety;
- damage to the environment;
- failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements;
- negligence;
- breach of AFA internal policies and procedures;
- conduct likely to damage AFA's reputation;
- unauthorised disclosure of confidential information;
- the deliberate concealment of any of the above.

A Whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith. If you are aware of an issue that falls within the term 'protected disclosure' you should report it. If you are uncertain whether your concern is within the scope of this policy, you should seek advice from the HR Manager or the Registered Manager, who is also the Designated Whistleblowing Officer.

Raising a Whistleblowing Concern.

Such concerns may relate to the conduct of a member of AFA's staff, but they may also relate to the actions of a third party, such as a service user, supplier or provider. All concerns should initially be raised with a Manager unless there are issues which indicate a particularly complex or high-risk situation, in which case a response from a senior member of staff may be more appropriate.

As stated above, this policy covers those:

- that are considered more serious;
- where a Manager has not fully addressed your concerns;
- that you would prefer not to raise with the designated personnel.

In such circumstances you should contact the Designated Whistleblowing Officer.

In the first instance, AFA will arrange a meeting with you to discuss your concerns. Integral to this policy is your ability to bring a colleague or union representative to any meeting which may be convened in respect of whistleblowing concerns. Your companion may be asked to sign a form which confirms their agreement to respect the confidentiality of all those involved in the disclosure, and any subsequent investigation.

If you wish to raise your concerns confidentially, AFA will make every effort to protect your identity. If it is felt necessary for anyone involved in the investigation to know your identity, we will inform you. Whistleblowers who are concerned that they could be the subject of a reprisal if their identity is revealed should inform the Whistleblowing Officer as soon as possible.

This policy provides an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating, and responding to any serious wrongdoing or concerns that have been identified in the workplace. AFA recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body, such as a regulator, e.g. Ofsted. However, advice must be taken before reporting a concern to anyone outside of AFA. The Agency does not, other than in exceptional circumstances, believe it is appropriate to alert the media to any concerns or discussions that have taken place.

Investigation and Outcome.

All concerns raised using this policy will be investigated and assessed as required. AFA may, if considered necessary, appoint specialist external investigators.

AFA will keep you informed of the progress of any investigation. However, the need for confidentiality may prevent us from sharing specific details relating to the investigation or outcome.

A Whistleblower may be subject to disciplinary action if they make a false or malicious allegation, do so in bad faith or with a view to personal gain.

Protection and Support for Whistleblowers.

It is acknowledged by AFA that a Whistleblower may be worried about the risk of repercussions after sharing any concerns. However, AFA operate a service that aims to be transparent, open and honest. Staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith, even if their concerns are later considered to be mistaken, will be fully supported throughout the process of the investigation, assessment and outcome.

AFA strongly believes that no one should experience treatment that is detrimental to their physical, mental, or emotional health because they have raised a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such treatment, inform the Whistleblowing Officer at the earliest

opportunity. A Whistleblower must not, at any time, be subjected to retaliation or threats, and anyone involved in such behaviour may be made subject to disciplinary action.

Safeguarding

AFA is committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children. Any matter that comes to the attention of carers, staff, freelance workers, consultants and Panel Members, which is of a child protection nature, will be reported to the relevant authorities under the Child Protection Referrals procedure, as outlined in AFA's Safeguarding policy.

Where a member of staff, freelance worker, consultant, Panel Member or Foster Carer considers that a child protection matter has arisen within the Agency, but has not been dealt with appropriately or comprehensively, s/he may use this policy; reporting to a senior Manager within AFA, the Local Authority responsible for the child/ren placed or the Regulatory Authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
26-32 Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 1231

Legislation

Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) amended by the Employment Rights Act 1996

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Expectations of Foster Carers Behaviour Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Staff Handbook	All staff
Allegations Against Staff and Carers	All staff and Foster Carers

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