



## **Safeguarding Policy**

*“Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility”*

*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* (DfE July 2018) and *The Children Act 1989* define the safeguarding and promotion of children and young people’s welfare as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment;
- Preventing the impairment of children’s health or development;
- Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, and
- Positive action to enable all children to achieve the best outcomes.

AFA recognises that the welfare of children and young people is paramount, and our duty is to:

- Protect children and young people who receive a service from AFA.
- Educate and support Foster Carers and their families to safeguard themselves, their family and the children in placement.
- Ensure that everyone is aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and that all staff, including Independent Workers, and Foster Carers have a good working knowledge of relevant policies and procedures; being familiar with the process to report concerns, instigate whistle blowing and deliver best practice.

AFA are mindful that people who are directly supporting carers and children, or caring for children, should be alert of the heightened vulnerability of a child who:

- Is disabled and has specific additional needs.
- Has special educational needs, regardless of whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Is a young carer.
- Is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including involvement with gangs and association with organised crime.
- Is frequently missing or going missing from care or from home.
- Is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, radicalisation or exploitation.
- Has lived in family circumstances which have created challenges and risks for the child, such as exposure to drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic violence.
- Has returned home to their family from care.
- Is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- Is involved in selling and/or the distribute of drugs. Involvement in this activity is known as working ‘county lines’.

## **The aims of AFA Fostering are:**

- A commitment to provide safe, caring, and professional foster care for every child placed with AFA, recognising the vulnerability of children with disabilities;
- To ensure that children feel safe and protected and that they are safe;
- To celebrate the diversity of gender, ability, language, sexuality, ethnic origin, faith and culture. AFA believes that every adult and child should be respected and valued;
- To offer placement choice to ensure that children are matched to carers who can meet their needs;
- To work closely with colleagues and other professionals to ensure that every child placed is provided with a care experience that gives them the opportunity to succeed;
- To support carers to provide care which improves the life chances of children and young people and helps them to be healthy, stay safe and make a positive contribution to society.

## **AFA will achieve these aims:**

- By children and young people being facilitated to communicate their wishes and feelings about decisions that affect them and, where these cannot be acted on, to be given a clear and honest explanation;
- By supporting children and young people to develop their self-care and independence skills, commensurate with their age and understanding;
- To help them to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up and to reach their full potential, playing an active role in society;
- By supporting children to recognise risks and develop the ability to protect themselves from harm or abuse.
- By ensuring that all staff working with Foster Carers and the children living with them, are qualified and experienced and prioritise safeguarding for every child in our care;
- By considering staff, Foster Carers, and Independent Workers as 'people in positions of trust' and to manage safeguarding arrangements, including Safer Recruitment practice;
- By Foster Carers being supported to care for children to the best of their ability by Placement Managers providing a high standard of supervision, regularly discussing issues relating to risk and safeguarding;
- By supervising staff who are supporting Foster Carers to ensure they routinely discuss safeguarding practice. This should include reviewing those young people seen as 'at risk' by their inclusion on the AFA Risk Register;
- Commitment to ongoing training for all staff, independent workers, and Foster Carers to ensure awareness of their responsibilities and promote best practice;
- The Safeguarding Lead and other Senior Managers to ensure they have an awareness of the key safeguarding partners within each Authority, as well as the arrangements for individual Agencies working together;
- The Safeguarding Lead to ensure best practice and learning is regularly shared with the staff group, particularly those cases relating to Child Death Reviews and Serious Case Reviews.
- By ensuring that children, young people and Foster Carers who are dissatisfied with the service or support provided, will be given advice and information on the complaints procedures for AFA and regulatory authorities. In addition, information regarding advocacy services will be routinely given to all children placed, in a format they can understand and easily use.

## **Risk Assessment of Children and Young People**

*AFA will implement a proportionate approach to risk assessment.*

It is anticipated that all children and young people referred to AFA will have a current risk assessment, completed by their referring Agency. This should clarify the child's needs and provide information that will enable the best match to be made. If a risk assessment has not been forwarded, the Duty Coordinator will request this from the Local Authority Placement Team.

After a child had been placed with an AFA carer, the Agency's Placement Manager (also known as a Supervising Social Worker) for that family will update their Safer Caring policy to consider any specific needs or risks identified at the point of the initial referral. The Placement Manager will consult with the child's Social Worker where this is considered necessary, and the Safer Caring policy should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting.

It is important to ensure that any risk assessment allows scope for risk taking and consequential learning appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. The aim is to support them in their development and learning, which should include guidance on how to keep themselves safe.

AFA recognises the importance of ongoing consideration as to safeguarding issues for the children in our care, and their respective foster families, throughout the duration of the placement. Therefore, risk assessments will be reviewed at each Looked After Review. This setting should facilitate contributions from other professionals and ensure the risk assessment includes the most recent information available.

Any amendments to a risk assessment will be documented on the Agency's risk assessment form and entered on the child's electronic record (CHARMS). A copy will be sent to the Local Authority Social Worker and anyone else who, it has been agreed, can have access to the information. Any proposed changes will be considered with the carer before updating takes place. Safer caring and safeguarding will always be discussed at each carer's monthly supervision meeting.

The risk assessment may also be reviewed if any of the following have occurred:

- Where a child has placed themselves or others at significant risk.
- Where changes in a child's health needs has increased an existing risk.
- Where a criminal offence has been committed.
- Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, and/or a criminal offence may have been committed.
- Where a young person meets the criteria for a Schedule 7 notification.
- Where there is, or has been, a serious threat to a child's life.

In all such situations, the child's Social Worker, who is based within the Local Authority, must be informed in a timely manner that the level of perceived risk has changed, and a new assessment needs to be completed. If the risk is manageable within the family, considering any additional support or training that can be offered, the Safer Caring policy for the carers must be amended to reflect any concerns. However, if there is a significant risk and the placement is no longer felt to be viable, AFA will attempt to put interim measures in place that will maintain the placement so that a planned move can take place. In such a situation, liaison with the Local Authority Social Worker and Placement Team is vital.

In addition, the details of those seen as being at significant risk will be included on the AFA Risk Register. This is to ensure the adequate monitoring of those who could be at risk, or considered to be risky in their behaviour towards other children and young people.

## **Criteria for inclusion on the Risk Register**

The following children or young people will be included on the Risk Register:

- Any child who is identified at risk of, or subject to, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) either via the completion of CSE toolkit, assessment by external professionals, meeting or at the point of referral.
- Any child who has been known to self-harm on more than 2 occasions in the last 6 months.
- Any child who has threatened suicide in the last 12 months.
- Any child who has made an allegation against a carer (current or former), or other significant person in their lives in the last 6 months.
- Any child who has been absent or missing from placement on more than one occasion in the last 6 months.
- Any child who is considered at significant risk from people in their family or network, such as risk from parents. Any risk should be seen as significant based on the criteria of potential harm to self or others.
- Any child who is seen to engage in significantly risk-taking behaviour, e.g. criminal behaviour, exploitation and/or County Lines, drug or solvent use, eating disorders etc.
- Any child who has been charged with a criminal offence over the 12 months.
- Any child who is involved in a child protection investigation at the current time.
- Any child who has experienced significant harm as a result of the actions of others within their network (e.g. at school, in the community).

Note will be made of young people with identified significant emotional or mental health needs, and highlighted separately, in particular for 2, 3, and 7,

## **Safer caring**

### **Statutory framework**

Regulation 12 (1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 requires Fostering Service Providers to prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with Foster Carers from abuse or neglect.

### **Aims and objectives of Safer Caring Policies**

Safer Caring Policies contribute towards:

- Keeping children safe from abuse by adults in the household.
- Keeping children safe from abuse by other children in the household.
- Keeping children safe from accessing inappropriate material in print, television, video, games or online.
- Minimising (as far as is possible) the risk of accident and injury within the household to an acceptable everyday level.
- Keeping members of the foster family safe from allegations of neglect and/or abuse.

### **Application of Safer Caring Policies**

A Safer Caring Policy must be completed and kept up to date by AFA for every Looked after Child in placement. A generic policy will be completed with carers during their assessment and an individual policy for each child placed will be written during, or immediately following, a placement planning meeting. At this point, there is an expectation that the needs of each child have been considered and a Local Authority risk assessment completed.

A copy of the carer's policy in respect of each Looked after Child will be placed on both the child and the carer's electronic file by the Placement Manager. If the child is of sufficient age and understanding, the policy should be shared with them.

### **Review of Safer Caring Policies**

The Safer Caring Policy will need to be revised as the circumstances of the household and the children in placement change. The risk assessment for each child or young person should be updated alongside the Safer Caring Policy (see 'Risk Assessment of Children and Young People Policy').

The policy should be amended and circulated as soon as practical:

- Whenever there are significant changes.
- At the time of the child's Looked After Review or
- The Foster Carer's annual review.

There are no definitive criteria as to what constitutes significant harm. However, CoramBAAF identify the following as key indicators:

- The degree and extent of physical harm;
- The duration and frequency of abuse or neglect;
- The extent of premeditation;
- The degree of threats and coercion;
- Evidence of sadism, and bizarre or unusual elements relating to child sexual abuse.

### **Thinking about the uniqueness of each family**

The strategies that families have in place to make sure that everyone stays safe in the home will vary from family to family. In most families, these strategies are unwritten and frequently unspoken. Children learn how the family operates as part of their day-to-day development and generally accept this as the 'norm', as they may have limited experience of households other than their own.

However, Foster Carers need to be aware of the strategies they use for two reasons:

- Firstly, carers need to consider the potential impact of the way the family functions when a child joins the household. Adjustments are likely to be needed, but carers will need to think of ways to minimise the disruption to family routines whilst being responsive to the needs of the child coming into the family.

The child to be placed will have previous experience of family life, and the strategies used in their own homes may be very different to those agreed in the foster home. Some children will come from chaotic households where there are few boundaries and adjusting to a more formal setting may be difficult. Others may come from very rigid and structured backgrounds where they have had little control over their own lives. In such circumstances adjusting to new-found freedoms can be problematic.

- Secondly, carers will need to identify behaviour or practices within their own household that might be acceptable to them but which could increase the level of risk to any of those who are resident in the home as a result of them fostering

## Developing Safer Caring Policies

A Safer Caring Policy does not mean changing everything that carers are currently doing. The policy provides an opportunity to reflect on how the household operates and what needs to change to ensure that children and household members are protected. Where there is a possibility of loss, danger or injury, carers need to work with the Placement Manager to develop strategies to minimise identified risks.

The aim of the Safer Caring Policy is not to create a complicated or rigid set of rules for all those living in the fostering household. The policy should be as concise and clear as possible, aiming to give a child the experience of living in a family whilst ensuring '... they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care' (CoramBAAF). For further information see the Foster Carer 's Handbook.

## Recording

One of the most effective ways that carers can protect themselves from allegations is to ensure they record regularly with a good level of detail. This should provide the context for any events, a list of those present, their behaviour and any concerns expressed by those attending. The CHARMS system is available to all Foster Carers to complete their recordings. This is regularly checked and discussed during supervision with the carer's Placement Manager. Carers need to record on either a daily or weekly basis based on several factors, such as the stability of the placement or the length of time the child has been placed. Good records can provide a valuable resource as they:

- Provide a history of work undertaken with the child
- Record decisions made and the child or young person's views
- Protect the child and the fostering household
- Provide continuity if the child's Social Worker or carer's Placement Manager leaves
- Help carers and other professionals review the work carried out, aiming to record and analyse any examples of best practice

## E-safety and Safe use of Images

AFA strongly believe that children and young people should have access to the Internet and other related technology, but we also recognise the importance of safeguarding children from potential risk when using such. This policy aims to identify how carers can keep children and young people in the home safe.

**Parental control software** - Adequate parental control software must be installed on the Internet service provider, and any computers children have access to, along with up to date anti-virus software and recognised security software. There is further guidance on parental controls in the Foster Carer's handbook.

**Monitoring a child's use of the Internet** – There should be a discussion at the placement planning meeting on how Foster Carers manage the frequency and duration of Internet use by children. (For further information see the Placement with Foster Carer's Policy).

AFA run regular training on Internet safety, which is facilitated by a CEOP ambassador (Child Exploitation and Online Protection). The course provides additional information and practical advice on all areas covered in the safeguarding section of the Foster Carer's Handbook.

AFA recognises that children can be more vulnerable if they are using electronic equipment in their own personal space, such as a bedroom. If this is the case there needs to be robust safeguards in place to limit access to the Internet, this should include duration and content. Mobile phones have many uses but there should be oversight of their use to ensure that any children living in the home are safe. Phones can, with careful planning and safeguards, be used positively to facilitate contact with family members, but some may pose a serious risk to a child.

This can be a difficult topic for carers, but it should be discussed at the placement planning meeting and throughout the placement. The most effective protection is for carers to help children and young people understand the risks associated with the Internet. This is best done through open discussion, with carers ensuring everyone in the home uses IT responsibly.

**Use of Images** - Carers should discuss the taking of photographs and videos with the child's Social Worker when the child is first placed. If the child is of sufficient age and understanding their consent should be sought before any photos or recordings are made. No child should be photographed or filmed in the bath, in their night-clothes or underwear, or without clothes.

The Placement Plan must state who can give agreement for any recording. This should be discussed using the delegated authority decision making toolkit. No images or information relating to a child or young person or their family should be placed on any social media site at any time. Should it come to AFA's attention that images have been circulated online, a standard of care enquiry may be initiated. If Foster Carers wish to include a child in their care within their social media profile, for instance as a way of normalising them within their family unit, this must be discussed with both the Child's social worker and their Placement Manager to consider the child or young person's needs and potential risks.

## **Child protection and Safeguarding referrals**

The welfare and safety of children is a shared responsibility and AFA believe it is unacceptable for a child or young person to experience abuse or neglect at any time in any setting. AFA recognises its legal and moral duty to safeguard the welfare of children, to protect them from harm and respond quickly where there are concerns that a child is, or may be, suffering significant harm. AFA works in partnership with Local Authority Children's Services, Police and other relevant agencies to ensure that child protection concerns are handled sensitively and professionally with the best interests of the child at the forefront of any decision making.

The key principles of safeguarding are that:

- Children have a right to be safe and should be protected from all forms of abuse and neglect
- Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility
- Children are best protected when there is a coordinated response from all relevant agencies

Further information can be obtained from the Department of Education website (see below).

This policy is also relevant to the recruitment and employment of staff and Foster Carers, employee and carer conduct, disciplinary procedures, health and safety policies and confidentiality. Where there are concerns that a child in an AFA placement has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm because of actions, committed or omitted, by a Foster Carer or member of staff, the 'Managing Allegations against Staff and Foster Carer's Procedures' must be followed.

This policy addresses concerns regarding Child Protection, which must be robustly addressed regardless of the status of the alleged abuser, including the child's family, friends, carers and other known or unknown adults, AFA or other Agency employees or unrelated children and young people.

### **Reporting concerns or allegations**

For concerns or allegations relating to AFA Foster Carers, Independent Social Workers or members of staff, see the 'Managing Allegations against Staff and Foster Carers' and 'Whistleblowing' policies. These outline our responsibilities relating to safeguarding for those who are in positions of trust.

All concerns or allegations regarding a child placed with an AFA Foster Carer must be reported at the earliest opportunity to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or, if outside of office hours, the On-Call Manager. This includes concerns or allegations about another child, a visitor to the foster home, the child's family, a teacher, Social Worker or any other persons. The Designated Safeguarding Lead is the Registered Manager or, if not available, another Social Work Manager available to support staff members raising a concern.

Where the concern or allegation relates to historical abuse a referral should still be made. It should not be assumed that the allegation has been previously shared or addressed.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will complete a notification to Ofsted as per Schedule 7 of the Fostering Regulations 2011. Please see separate policy for further information.

### **Recording**

Recording relating to any concerns, allegations or action taken by the Agency in relation to carers must be entered on CHARMS within 12 hours of the information first being raised. The Placement Manager for the Foster Carer, where the child or young person is placed, is responsible for making a clear record, specifying the name and status of those spoken to. If this is not possible the Placement Manager must speak with their Manager or the Designated Safeguarding Lead giving reasons as to why they cannot meet the recording deadline.

Foster Carers also need to complete recordings relating to any concerns or allegations within the above timescale. If they are unable to do so, they should contact the Placement Manager in the first instance, or subsequently the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Please refer to the 'Record Keeping and Confidentiality' policy for further information and guidance.

For allegations relating to staff members, please consult with the HR Manager and Safeguarding Lead around recording policies. Guidance can also be found within the Staff Handbook.

### **Immediate Risk**

If a child needs urgent medical attention or protection, the Foster Carer must act immediately. This may include calling the emergency services and informing them that a child has experienced or is at risk of experiencing significant harm.

The Foster Carer should contact the Placement Manager, or whoever is on duty as soon as they become aware of the need to take emergency action. This should not take precedent over responding to a child's safety and welfare but contact with the Placement Manager should be made as soon as practical.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead, or in their absence another Manager in the Agency, must be contacted by the Placement Manager to whom the Foster Carer has spoken.

Once the immediate risk to the child is addressed the following procedures must be followed:

### **Referring Concerns to Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Partners**

When contacted by a Foster Carer or Placement Manager regarding a concern or allegation, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or on-call Manager must decide if a referral should be made to Children's Social Care. The referral must be made to the Local Authority where the child is placed, in line with Local Safeguarding Procedures. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will have information on how to contact Safeguarding Partners.

A verbal referral to Children's Social Care must subsequently be made in writing, and feedback given on any action taken within 48 hours of the Local Authority being contacted. If no feedback is received within this timescale, the Designated Safeguarding Lead should contact Children's Social Care to establish what action has or will be taken.

If there are concerns regarding the response to the referral made to Children's Social Care, the Designated Safeguarding Lead should contact the relevant Manager of the Children's Social Care team who is dealing with the referral. Contact between everyone involved in making the referral, including those who initially expressed concern, must be comprehensively recorded.

The following should also be notified when a referral has been made:

- The child(ren)'s Social Worker who has the responsibility to notify the child's parents and carry out any actions required to protect the child(ren) e.g. deciding whether it is necessary for the child to change placement.
- The Regulatory Authority if a Section 47 Enquiry is initiated.
- AFA Decision Maker.

Under no circumstances should information about the concerns or allegations be shared with anyone to whom the referral relates. As and when this is felt to be necessary, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to liaise with relevant agencies and decide what information will be shared.

Information about any action taken should be shared with the child's carers and other relevant members of staff within AFA on a need to know basis. All those who are aware of the allegations or concerns should be reminded of the AFA policy relating to confidentiality.

Where there are concerns relating to significant harm to a child, which lead to an Initial or Core Assessment by Children's Social Care, any information held by AFA about the child will be openly shared with Children's Social Care.

### **Section 47 Enquiries**

AFA will cooperate fully with Children's Social Care should a decision be made to undertake a Section 47 Enquiry (Children Act 1989). This will include attending Strategy Meetings as required and sharing information from case records.

AFA and the relevant Local Authority must identify who will be responsible for liaising with the Regulatory Authority.

### **For further information see:**

- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Children Act 1989: Guidance and Regulations Volume 4

- Children Act 2004
- National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (<https://www.gov.uk>): [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/729914/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard\\_Children-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children-2018.pdf)
- NSPCC Core-Info leaflets - Evidence Based Resource relating to abuse and neglect. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/Search?term=core+info>
- See also NSPCC <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection>
- [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) for information on Internet safety and other identified risks.

## Connected Policies or guidance

<b>Name of Policy / Guidance</b>	<b>Relevant for</b>
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Placement Managers Guidance	Placement Managers, Senior Managers
Whistleblowing Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Equal Opportunities Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers	All staff and Foster Carers
Changes in Fostering Households and Policy on Changes in Relationships	Foster Carers, Placement Managers and Senior Managers
Expectations of Foster Carer's Behavior	All staff and Foster Carers
Participation Policy	Children and young people, Foster Carers and all staff
Behaviour Management Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children Against Bullying	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children Against Radicalisation	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children against Trafficking	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children against Child Sexual Exploitation	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children Against Female Genital Mutilation	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding children against Gang Activity	All staff and Foster Carers
<b>Name of Policy / Guidance</b>	<b>Relevant for</b>
Safeguarding Children from Criminal Exploitation including 'County Lines'	All staff and Foster Carers
Safeguarding Children from Honour-Based Violence	All staff and Foster Carers
Children Missing from Care	All staff and Foster Carers
Managing Allegations Against Staff and Foster Carers	All staff and Foster Carers
Notification of Significant Events	Placement Managers and Senior Managers
Placement with Foster Carers Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Delegated Authority Policy	Foster Carers, Placement Manager
AFA Staff Handbook	All staff

**This policy was amended in January 2021 and will be reviewed in January 2022. Additional amendments will be made as and when required.**