



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 Parents and their families to safeguard themselves, their family and the children in their care
- Ensure that everyone is aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and that all staff, including Independent Workers, and Foster Parents have a good working knowledge of relevant policies and procedures; being familiar with the process to report concerns, instigate whistleblowing and deliver best practice

AFA are mindful that people who are directly supporting Foster Parents 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.

The aims of AFA Fostering are:

- A commitment to provide safe, caring, and professional foster care for every child cared for by AFA
- To ensure that children feel safe and protected and that they are safe
- To recognise the vulnerability of particular children, such as those with disabilities

- 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 a choice of homes to ensure that children are matched to Foster Parents who can meet their needs
- To work closely with colleagues and other professionals to ensure that every child looked after is provided with a care experience that gives them the opportunity to succeed
- To support Foster Parents to provide trauma informed care which improves the life chances of children and young people, and which 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
- Supporting children and young people to develop their self-care and independence skills, commensurate with their age and understanding
- Helping them to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up and to reach their full potential, playing an active role in society
- Identifying risks to children and young people and considering ways to reduce such
- Supporting children to recognise risks and develop the ability to protect themselves from harm or abuse
- Ensuring that all staff working with Foster Parents and the children living with them, are qualified and experienced and prioritise safeguarding for every child in our care
- Considering staff, Foster Parents, and Independent Workers as 'people in positions of trust' and to manage safeguarding arrangements, including Safer Recruitment practice
- Foster Parents being supported to care for children to the best of their ability by Fostering Social Workers providing a high standard of supervision, regularly discussing issues relating to risk and safeguarding
- Its staff who support Foster Parents 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
- Its commitment to ongoing training for all staff, Panel Members, independent workers, and Foster Parents to ensure awareness of their responsibilities and to promote best practice
- The Safeguarding Lead and other Senior Managers having an awareness of the key safeguarding partners within each Authority, as well as the arrangements for individual Agencies working together
- The Safeguarding Lead ensuring best practice and learning is regularly shared with the staff group, particularly those cases relating to Serious Case Reviews
- By ensuring that children, young people and Foster Parents who are dissatisfied with the service or support provided, are given advice and information on the complaint's procedures for AFA and regulatory authorities. In addition, information regarding advocacy services will be routinely given to all children AFA care for, in a format they can understand and easily use

Risk Assessment and Reduction Plans of Children and Young People

AFA will implement a proportionate approach to risk assessment and it is anticipated that all children and young people referred to the Agency will have a current risk assessment, completed by their referring Agency. This should clarify their needs and provide information to 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.

After a child has moved to live with an AFA Foster Parent, the Fostering Social Worker for that family will complete a Safer Caring Policy to consider any specific needs or risks identified at the point of the initial referral and at the early stages of the arrangement. They will consult with the child's Social Worker where necessary as well as the Foster Parent. AFA will also complete a Risk Assessment and Reduction Plan, specific to each child, and a CSE toolkit, depending on the age of the child.

It is important to ensure that any such Plan 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 as well as employing support and/or means to reduce risk factors.

AFA recognises the importance of ongoing consideration as to safeguarding issues for the children in its care, and their respective foster families, throughout the duration of the time they live with them. Therefore, Risk Assessment and Reduction Plans will be treated as 'live' documents and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, but particularly at both the child's and the Foster Parents' reviews. These should include contributions from other professionals to ensure the Plans include up to date information.

The Risk Assessment and Reduction Plan will be documented 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 Foster Parent before updating takes place.

Safer caring and safeguarding will always be discussed at each Foster Parents' monthly supervision meeting, along with risk factors. The Risk Assessment and Reduction Plan will also be updated at the point that target dates for risks to be reduced have been set. The Plan 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 have 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 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, additional support or training to reduce risk and the timeframe for such should be considered. The Safer Caring Policy should also be updated to reflect any significant changes or concerns. However, if there is a significant risk and the care arrangement is no longer felt to be viable, AFA will attempt to put interim measures in place that will maintain the arrangement so that a planned move can take place. In such a situation, liaison with the child's Social Worker and Local Authority 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:

- 1) 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.
- 2) Any child who has been known to self-harm on more than 2 occasions in the last 6 months.
- 3) Any child who has threatened suicide in the last 12 months.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Any child who has been absent or missing from the foster home on more than one occasion in the last 6 months.
- 6) 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.

- 7) 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.
- 8) Any child who has been charged with a criminal offence over the 12 months.
- 9) Any child who is involved in a child protection investigation at the current time or who is connected to an ongoing LADO process.
- 10) 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 living with Foster Parents 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.
- Helping children to build trusting and safe relationships with their Foster Parents
- 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 child looked after. A generic policy will be completed with Foster Parents during their assessment and an individual policy for each child in their care will be written following a Care Arrangement Planning Meeting. At this point, there is an expectation that the needs of each child have been considered and a Risk Assessment and Reduction Plan has also been completed, as detailed above.

A copy of the Foster Parent's policy in respect of each child who is looked after will be recorded on both the child and the Foster Parent's electronic file by the Fostering Social Worker.

If the child is of sufficient age and understanding, the policy should be shared with them. However, a separate 'Safety Plan' will be drawn up alongside each child to help them to develop their understanding of risk and safer caring. The approach to completion and style of this plan will be dependent on the child's age and understanding. This will be recorded on their individual record and shared with their Social Worker.

Review of Safer Caring Policies

The Safer Caring Policy will need to be revised as the circumstances regarding the children within the household change. The Risk Assessment and Reduction Plan for each child or young person should be updated alongside the Safer Caring Policy. The policy should be amended and circulated on an ongoing basis as soon as practical:

- Whenever there are significant changes, including at the time of the child's Review
- When the Foster Parent's Annual Review is completed

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 Parents need to be aware of the strategies they use for two reasons:

- Firstly, they need to consider the potential impact of the way their family functions when a child joins the household. Adjustments are likely to be needed, but Foster Parents will need to think of ways to minimise the disruption to family routines whilst being responsive to the needs of the child joining their family. They 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 homes 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; adjusting to new-found freedoms can be problematic.
- Secondly, Foster Parents 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 Foster Parents and their families do, nor is its aim to create a complicated or rigid set of rules for all those living in the fostering household. The policy provides an opportunity to reflect on how the household operates and what needs to change to ensure that all members of the home are protected. Where there is a possibility of loss, danger or injury, Foster Parents need to work with their Fostering Social Worker to develop strategies to minimise identified risks. It 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 Parents' Handbook.

Recording

One of the most effective ways that Foster Parents can protect themselves from allegations is to ensure they record regularly with a good level of detail and that they communicate with fellow professionals about what they are doing. The recording they complete should provide the context for any events, a list of those present, their behaviour and any concerns expressed by those attending. Recordings should complement other communication that takes place, such as sharing of information in meetings, supervision, by phone or in email.

The CHARMS system is available to all Foster Parents to complete their recordings. This is regularly checked and discussed during supervision with their Fostering Social Worker. The rate of recording for Foster Parents will be based on several factors, such as how settled a child in their care is or the length of time the child has been living with them. Any significant risks or concerns need to be highlighted to the Fostering Social Worker as soon as possible alongside this, as Foster Parents cannot be sure when their recordings will be read.

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 Foster Parent's Fostering Social Worker leaves
- Help Foster Parents and other professionals review the work carried out, aiming to record and analyse any examples of best practice
- Provide a picture for the child in the future of their experience within the foster family

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 also recognises the importance of safeguarding them from potential risk when using such. This policy aims to identify how Foster Parents 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. Additional guidance can also be provided by the family's Fostering Social Worker or is contained in the Foster Parent's Handbook.

Monitoring a child's use of the Internet – There should be a discussion at the Care Arrangement Planning Meeting as to how Foster Parents manage the frequency and duration of Internet use by children. (For further information see the Care Arrangements with Foster Parent's Policy).

AFA run regular training on Internet safety which provides additional information and practical advice on all areas covered in the safeguarding section of the Foster Parent's Handbook. Up to date information is also provided via the AFA Newsletter and further guidance can be found in the resources section of the Policy website or in the CHARMS document store.

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, including duration and content. Mobile phones have many uses but there should be oversight of such to ensure a child's safety. Their use of such should be discussed at the Care Arrangement Planning Meeting and throughout the arrangement.

Phones can, with careful planning and safeguards, be used positively to facilitate a child's time with their birth family and other significant people in their life, if this is deemed appropriate.

The most effective protection is for Foster Parents to help children and young people understand the risks associated with the Internet and this is best done through open discussion, with Foster Parents ensuring everyone in the home uses IT responsibly.

Use of Images – Foster Parents should discuss the taking of photographs and videos with the child's Social Worker when the child first comes to live with them. 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 nightclothes, underwear, or without clothes.

The Care Arrangement 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 Standards of Care Enquiry may be initiated. If Foster Parents 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 Fostering Social Worker to consider the child or young person's needs and potential risks before anything is posted.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Referrals

The welfare and safety of children is a shared responsibility and AFA believe it is unacceptable for them 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 Parents, employee and Foster Parent conduct, disciplinary procedures, health and safety policies and confidentiality. Where there are concerns that a child in an AFA arrangement has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm because of actions, committed or omitted, by a Foster Parent or member of staff, the relevant procedures will 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, Foster Parents 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 Parents, see the 'Managing Allegations, Complaints and Standards of Care Issues about Foster Parents' policy. This outlines AFA's responsibilities relating to the safeguarding for those who are in positions of trust.

All concerns or allegations regarding a child living with an AFA Foster Parent must be reported at the earliest opportunity to the Designated Safeguarding Lead who is the Registered Manager or, if they are not available and/or it is outside of office hours, another Social Work 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.

Where the concern or allegation relates to historical abuse, it should not be assumed that the allegation has been previously shared or addressed and a referral should still be made. 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 AFA in relation to Foster Parents must be entered on CHARMS within 12 hours of the information first being raised. The Fostering Social Worker for the Foster Parent, with whom the child or young person is living, is responsible for making a clear record, specifying the name and status of those spoken to. If this is not possible, they must speak with their Manager or the Designated Safeguarding Lead giving reasons as to why they cannot meet the recording deadline.

Foster Parents 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 their Fostering Social Worker 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 Human Resources and the Safeguarding Lead around recording policies. Guidance can also be found within the Staff Handbook and Whistleblowing Policy which outline our responsibilities relating to safeguarding for those who are employed in positions of trust.

Immediate Risk

If a child needs urgent medical attention or protection, the Foster Parent 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 as relevant.

Although it should not take precedent over responding to a child's safety and welfare, the Foster Parent should contact the Fostering Social Worker, or whoever is on duty as soon as they are able to regarding the need to take emergency action.

AFA's Designated Safeguarding Lead, or in their absence another Senior Manager, must be contacted by the Fostering Social Worker to whom the Foster Parent 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 Parent or Fostering Social Worker regarding a concern or allegation, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or other Senior 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 them 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's Social Worker has the responsibility to notify their birth parents and carry out any actions required to protect the child e.g. deciding whether it is necessary for them to move from their foster home.
- The Regulatory Authority if a Section 47 Enquiry is initiated.

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 to decide what information will be shared.

Information about any action taken should be shared with the child's Foster Parents 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 2023
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>
- 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 or <https://saferinternet.org.uk/> for information on Internet safety and other identified risks.
- <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/safer-caring>
- ‘Devising and updating risk assessment and management plans in fostering’ by Paul Adams.
<https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/devising-and-updating-risk-assessment-and-management-plans-fostering>

Connected Policies or guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers
Fostering Social Workers’ Guidance	Fostering Social Workers, Senior Managers
Whistleblowing Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Equal Opportunities Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Assessment and Approval of Foster Parents	All staff and Foster Parents
Changes in Fostering Households and Policy on Changes in Relationships	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers and Senior Managers
Expectations of Foster Parent’s Behavior	All staff and Foster Parents
Participation and Advocacy Policy	Children and young people, Foster Parents and all staff
Behaviour Management Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children Against Bullying	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children Against Radicalisation	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children against Trafficking	All staff and Foster Parents

Safeguarding Children against Child Sexual Exploitation	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children Against Female Genital Mutilation	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding children against Gang Activity	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children from Criminal Exploitation including 'County Lines'	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Children from Honour-Based Violence	All staff and Foster Parents
Children Missing from Care	All staff and Foster Parents
Managing Allegations, Complaints and Standards of Care Issues about Foster Parents	All staff and Foster Parents
Notification of Significant Events	Fostering Social Workers and Senior Managers
Care Arrangements with Foster Parents Policy	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers
Delegated Authority Policy	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers
AFA Staff Handbook	All staff
Safer Recruitment	Staff, Foster Parents, Panel Members, Independent Staff

This policy was amended in January 2024 and will be reviewed in January 2025. Additional amendments will be made as and when required.

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