



**Children's Safeguarding and
Social Work**

Camden Fostering Service

Safeguarding and safe caring in foster
care

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1 Introduction and purpose

It is part of Camden's corporate parenting role to ensure that children whom they care for are kept safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

Regulation 12 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 states that fostering services should have a written policy that safeguards children living in foster placements, with procedures that should be followed whenever there is an allegation of abuse or neglect.

National Minimum Standard 4 sets out the safeguarding standards required of foster carers and Standard 10 sets out the health and safety standards for the physical fostering environment to ensure the safety of children. In particular, the standards emphasise the role of foster carers in teaching LAC to protect themselves from harm.

2 Safeguarding mechanisms

The Fostering Service has developed a system of procedures to ensure the safety of Looked After Children placed with foster carers, the aim of which is to provide guidance and procedures for service staff and foster carers in relation to:

- safeguarding and protecting Looked after Children from abuse and neglect
- safeguarding foster carers and their families from allegations
- helping foster carers to provide safe home environments for LAC and monitor placements
- dealing with child protection issues and allegations arising from placements
- providing guidance on general safeguarding of Looked After Children.

2.1 Child protection procedures

In common with the Children's Safeguarding and Social Work division as a whole, the Fostering Service works to Part 5 of the Children Act 1989, *Working together to safeguard children*, and the London Safeguarding Board child protection procedures in cases where there are concerns that a Looked After Child is or may be suffering from significant harm.

2.2 Suitability of staff and foster carers

In line with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards, the fostering Service has a wide range of safeguards for the recruitment and vetting of service staff and prospective foster carers, as well as the recruitment, assessment, training and monitoring of all Camden foster carers.

The Fostering Service has developed robust systems to ensure that these processes are implemented and that only those people who are deemed suitable to work with children have unsupervised access to the child.

2.3 Dealing with complaints and allegations against carers

In line with Regulation 12 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and NMS standard 22, the Fostering Service has robust procedures in place for dealing with complaints and allegations made against foster carers and for carrying out child protection investigations where necessary.

Camden's fostering service policy for complaints and allegations against carers can be found at: .

2.4 Health and safety

In line with Standard 10 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering, The Fostering Service has procedures in place to ensure all Camden foster placements provide a safe and suitable physical environment for children. Camden uses a specific health and safety checklist to carry out an audit at the following points:

- when a carer is first being assessed
- when a child is first placed
- whenever an exemption from the carer's usual terms of approval is being sought
- during every annual review of the carer's approval.

The checklist is comprehensive and looks at all aspects of the foster household and any potential health and safety problems that may arise, as well as looking at issues such as space.

2.5 Parent and child placements

Where a child is placed in a fostering household with their parent who will have main responsibility for their care, their safety and welfare will be the primary responsibility of the foster carer regardless of the child's legal status.

To ensure children in such placements are afforded a high enough degree of protection, each placement will have specific agreements in place relating to the role of the foster carer in safeguarding the child and what action they will be required to take to protect the child and what recording and reporting should follow on from incidents. These agreements will be discussed at the Placement Agreement Meeting and recorded on the *Placement Plan*.

2.6 Other safeguarding policies

Foster carers will be supported to keep children safe, help educate children to keep themselves safe and recognise the signs that a child may be at risk of harm. Camden has a wide range of safeguarding policies and guidance available to foster carers, including:

- behaviour management
- anti-bullying
- missing children
- online safety
- child sexual and criminal exploitation.

3 Definition of safe caring

All families have a set of informal rules and boundaries that, although unwritten, are understood by family members and which provide a structure that helps families to cope with everyday difficulties.

For foster carers, these informal rules may need to be adjusted and written down in order to keep Looked After Children safe, keep themselves and their family safe from allegations, and help the Looked After Child settle into the placement more easily.

Looked After Children may come from families where there was no real structure to family life or boundaries on behaviour, and their pre-care experiences may affect their behaviour.

Children who have experienced abuse may display sexualised or aggressive behaviour that the foster carer's family rules do not cover, or where normal ways of dealing with the behaviour are not appropriate because of the risk of allegations being made against the carer.

Children who have a history of abuse may make false allegations against carers because:

- the situation reminds them of a pre-care experience of abuse
- they are trying to regain control of their lives
- they have misinterpreted an innocent action.

Therefore, the Fostering Service have a safe caring policy to provide guidance to foster carers on how to draw up formal rules so that they can care for children in a safe way that minimises the risk of abuse to the child and protects them and their families from allegations.

Many Looked After Children welcome "house rules" as it helps them to understand how the household operates and makes it easier for them to find their place within the family.

4 Purpose of the safe caring policy

Foster carers are often isolated when caring for Looked After Children, and this can increase the vulnerability of children living away from home. A safe caring policy provides one way of safeguarding Looked After Children and their foster carers. The aim of the policy is to ensure that:

- Looked After Children are kept safe from abuse and neglect
- foster carers and their families are kept safe from false allegations
- all children in the household are kept safe from abuse by other children.

5 Implementing a safe caring policy

It is the Fostering Service's policy that safe caring is built into foster carer's assessment, training, supervision and general practice at all stages. Safe caring will be considered at the following points:

5.1 Preparation training and assessment

Safe caring will be discussed at preparation training so that prospective foster carers are aware of the issues and how best to deal with problems. As part of their assessment, prospective foster carers will be required to examine how they would provide a safe caring environment for a child and what family rules they would need to change in order to do this.

5.2 Supervision and placement

On approval, the foster carer and their supervising social worker will be expected to draw up a written safe caring policy for the foster family. Foster carers should consider their safe caring policy, based on information about the child being placed and the needs of the children already living in the household, each time they accept a placement.

When considering whether or not to accept placements at the matching stage, foster carers should be encouraged to consider whether, given the particular needs and experiences of the child, the family would be able to care safely for them.

The foster carer should make their own family and any child placed with them aware of their safe caring policy and how it operates. The policy should be agreed with all members of the household, and consideration should be given as to the implications of the safe caring policy for the foster carer's care of their own children.

5.3 Training and professional development

All foster carers and any other member of their household who is involved in the care of Looked After Children should attend on-going training on safe caring and their training and development needs in relation to safe caring should be looked at regularly in supervision sessions.

As well as safe caring, foster carers will need training in recognising the signs of abuse and be aware of Camden's child protection procedures, especially how to refer on any concerns.

5.4 Recording

As part of the safe caring policy, foster carers would be expected to keep a daily log for each child placed with them detailing any:

- incidents
- use of sanctions or restraints
- accidents, injuries or serious illnesses
- unauthorised absences
- suspected abuse from outside the foster home
- disclosure of abuse from the child's pre-care history.

Daily logs are extremely important in the event of an allegation being made against the carer. A record should be made of any discussion with the child and who was present at the time.

5.5 Review of the policy

The policy should be regularly reviewed by the foster carer and their supervising social worker within supervision sessions, but particularly:

- as part of the foster carer's annual review
- whenever a child is being placed with the foster carer
- whenever there is a change to the composition of the fostering household.

5.6 Role of social work staff

- The foster carer's **supervising social worker** should ensure that the foster carer has an up to date safe caring policy and that it is regularly reviewed and changed when necessary.
- The **LAC social worker** should ensure that the foster carer has sufficient information about the child's history and behaviour to inform the foster carer's safe caring policy.

6 Safe caring guidance

Foster carers need to be aware of those members of the household who are likely to be more open to allegations of abuse. Generally, this will be older males, either those providing care or an older birth child. Single male carers are particularly vulnerable.

This means that there may need to be restrictions on what level of contact and hands-on caring male carers may be able to do, and whether they should be left alone with a Looked After Child, particularly where the child has a history of abuse or of making allegations against carers.

A foster family's safe caring policy should be capable of keeping everyone safe by providing clear rules around behaviour in the home and in other environments such as cars and on holidays.

When preparing for placements with their supervising social worker, the foster carer should:

- consider what changes may need to be made to household rules and the safe caring policy
- ensure they have all relevant information about the child, including any history of abuse to be able to cover any potential issues in the policy
- decide on how unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with and include this in the policy
- consider the impact of the placement and any changes to the policy on others in the household
- explain the policy and rules to the child and to their own family.

6 Elements of safe caring

6.1 Bedrooms

- All children must have their own bed.
- Sharing bedrooms will only be appropriate for younger siblings or same sex siblings.
- Children with a history of abusing other children should have their own room.
- Where children share a room, consideration should be given to other parts of the house where they may be able to have some space and privacy.
- Bedrooms should only be entered by others with permission.
- If children play in bedrooms, the door should be kept open and the foster carer should be able to hear what is happening or being said. Foster carers should regularly check on a child who is playing in a bedroom.

- If someone goes into the child's room, the door should be left open.
- Foster carers should not share a bed with a child, even when they are ill. Other sleeping arrangements should be made if a foster carer needs to stay close to a child during the night.
- Foster carers should carefully consider sending a child to their bedroom as a sanction if they have a history of abuse as this may trigger memories of pre-care abuse.
- Male carers should take extra precautions when putting children to bed, especially if they are lone carers.

6.2 Bathroom

- All young people who are able to bath and wash themselves should have privacy in the bathroom.
- Where younger children need help or supervision, this should be done by a female carer or both carers together. If the main foster carer is male, this should be taken into consideration during matching.
- If an older child requires help with washing or dressing, this should be done by a same sex adult carer.
- Children should be encouraged to gain self-caring skills so that they are able to bathe and wash themselves.

6.3 Playing

- Foster carers should consider where in the house children will be safe enough to play unsupervised.
- Doors of rooms where children are playing should be left open and the foster carer able to hear what is going on.
- When playing outside, foster carers should ensure that there are no risks.
- Foster carers should be aware of Looked After Children's greater vulnerability to bullying.

- Foster carers should not engage in or allow play fighting or tickling games.

6.4 Dress

- All household members should be properly dressed at all times.
- Children should have dressing gowns and proper nightwear.

6.5 Showing affection

In general, foster carers should provide a normal experience for looked after children, including physical contact in order to reassure or comfort a child. However, carers need to be aware of the child's history and how this may impact on their perception and consider the most appropriate way of showing affection.

- Children should be asked if they want cuddles or hugs etc and should be made aware that they can say no where this is unwanted.
- Male carers should exercise caution when showing affection.
- Demonstrations of warmth and affection, such as cuddles or story telling at bedtime, should take place in an environment that is mindful of a child's individual situation. For example, if the child has a history of making allegations, such demonstrations should take place in a communal part of the house.
- Couples should be discreet in showing affection to each other.

6.6 Car journeys

- Cars should be roadworthy, insured and with appropriate seats and seat belts fitted and used. It is an expectation that a car has passed its MOT and is regularly serviced.
- Any carer who is likely to be alone with the child in a car should be mindful of the child's history and situation.

6.7 Babysitters

- Foster carers should use only regular babysitters who have been DBS checked and are known to the child.

- Looked After Children should not be left in the care of the foster carer's birth children unless they have been assessed and checked as a member of the foster carer's support network.
- Looked After Children should not be left to care for younger children in the household.
- Foster carers should discuss any plans to stay out overnight with their supervising social worker so that checks can be made on whether care arrangements are adequate.

6.8 Photographs, videos and internet access

- Foster carers should be aware that some religions and cultures are sensitive to photo and video images being taken and should ask permission beforehand.
- Children should not be photographed or videoed in the bath or when undressed.
- A child's use of the internet, including social networking sites, instant messaging and mobile phones, should be discussed and agreed at the Placement Agreement Meeting. Foster carers should be advised as to the level of supervision a child may need when using the internet, based on their history and their needs. Use of the internet should always be monitored. Foster carers should refer to the online safety policy available at: <..\Online safety\online safety policies\Multi-agency online safety policy.doc>
- Foster carers should be aware that their own use of the internet complies with professional standards and that care is taken regarding the content of social networking sites websites.

6.9 Sex education

- Notify the child's social worker when considering starting discussions on sex and sexual issues. If the child brings the subject up, make a note of this and any response given.
- Use appropriate language when describing parts of the body.
- Use age appropriate books and information leaflets as an aid.

- Discuss the child's sex education needs with their social worker so that a decision can be made as to who will be responsible and how the issue will be dealt with.

7 Dealing with child protection issues

The following relates to child protection issues that **do not** involve an allegation against a foster carer. Child protection incidents involving foster carers are dealt with in the *Complaints and allegations* policy.

- Foster carers must be able to identify when a child they look after may be at risk of significant harm and who to contact to discuss the matter. Foster carers may become aware of child protection concerns either because the child discloses earlier abuse to their carer or becomes at risk of harm within the community they live. There may be concerns arising from contact.
- Supervising social workers must ensure that foster carers are aware of Camden's child protection procedures and have received the necessary safeguarding training to deal with disclosures or to identify possible harm and abuse.
- Children's social workers are responsible for carrying out child protection procedures in relation to any concerns raised and liaising with other agencies such as the police in order to complete investigations.

Foster carers should report any concerns or disclosures to the child's social worker and their supervising social worker. It is important that foster carers record concerns and any evidence of harm, for example, unexplained bruises.

The child's social worker should discuss the issues with their team manager and consult with the designated IRO on whether the child is at risk of significant harm and what action should be taken.

The allocated social worker should consult with the Police CAIT and convene a strategy meeting within 5 working days (or 1 working day where immediate action is needed). If a possible criminal offence has taken place out of Camden, social workers should make contact with the local police who will carry out the criminal investigation.

8 Relevant links

National Minimum Standards for Fostering

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

Fostering Service regulations

[The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

Fostering Services statutory guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-fostering-services>

London Safeguarding Children board child protection procedures

<https://www.londoncp.co.uk/#>