



**Children's Safeguarding and
Family Help**

Family, Friends and Fostering
Service

Anti-bullying guidance for foster placements

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Introduction

- Looked after children are more vulnerable to bullying than their peers and bullying can take place both at school or within the placement. Bullying can have a significant negative effect on the emotional wellbeing and development of a child and can disrupt their education.
- The Family, Friends and Fostering service and foster carers have a duty to protect CLA from bullying, challenge bullying behaviours and promote safe environments where bullying is not tolerated.
- This policy sets out what actions foster carers, supervising social workers and CLA social workers need to take in order to prevent bullying of CLA and deal effectively with incidents of bullying.

2 Information about bullying

Bullying is described as “.deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated over a period of time when it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves”. Examples of bullying behaviour include:

- verbal abuse such as teasing and name-calling
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking or pushing, or threats of physical abuse
- deliberately excluding people or humiliating them
- spreading rumours about the victim
- sexual abuse such as unwanted physical contact or comments about the victim’s sexuality
- racial abuse or harassment
- theft or damage to the victims property or extortion of money
- cyberbullying.

Why CLA are vulnerable

Bullies normally choose victims who are different and seem defenceless. CLA often fit this profile because of their looked after status:

- They do not live at home but are “in care”.
- They may be new to the school as they have moved placement and have no established friendship group.

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- They may avoid making friends and gaining peer support because they do not want other children to know they are looked after.
- Their history means they have experienced abuse and neglect that has affected their self-esteem or they may not have the necessary social skills to cope with the stresses of school life.

Signs of bullying

- not wanting to go to school or not wanting to go by particular transport or route
- headaches, stomach aches and other symptoms of illness
- becoming anxious or withdrawn or other behaviours that are out of character
- unexplained bruises
- frequently missing or damaged property
- coming home hungry because food or dinner money taken
- asking for more money (extortion)
- poor school work
- truancy.

3 Preventing bullying

Foster carers can prevent bullying by ensuring they promote positive behaviours, deal effectively with negative behaviours and challenge bullying within the placement.

- Foster carers and supervising social workers should discuss and agree an anti-bullying and anti-discrimination strategy as part of the safe caring policy for the fostering household.
- All children joining the fostering household should be made aware of the rules regarding bullying and behaviour and what standards of behaviour are expected of them.
- At the start of individual placements, the Placement Agreement Meeting should be the forum to discuss any particular characteristics that might make the child vulnerable to bullying and agree any plan or strategy to reduce this risk.
- If a looked after child is starting a new school, foster carers should link with the child's teacher and the designated CLA teacher to ensure the school has

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put in arrangements for the child to be “buddied” and has an adult identified to whom the child can talk to if there are any problems.

- By taking an interest in their schooling and asking questions about their day, foster carers may be able to encourage children to talk about any problems they may be experiencing. That way, action can be taken swiftly before matters escalate.
- Foster carers may want to help CLA develop a story about why they are looked after that they feel comfortable sharing with their peers.
- Foster carers can also consider strategies to help the child make friends by inviting school friend’s home for tea or encouraging the child to join after school clubs and taking up activities.

4 Responding to incidents

- All incidents or allegations of bullying must be taken seriously and acted on immediately. Foster carers should be vigilant to the signs of bullying and encourage the child to talk about incidents so that they can get help to stop the bullying.
- Where possible, foster carers should get advice from supervising social workers and the child’s social worker about how to investigate bullying and what action to take. All actual and suspected incidents should be recorded in the child’s daily record.

If a child discloses that they are being bullied, foster carers should:

- reassure the child they have done the right thing in telling someone about it
- find out where the bullying is taking place and who is involved
- explain to the child what action will be taken to stop the bullying and ask them to report any further incidents
- ensure incidents are recorded
- discuss the issue with the child’s social worker and ask what resources can be put in place to help the child (ie: counselling)
- consider what support the child needs to help them to deal effectively with the bullies so that they can increase their self-esteem and assertiveness
- continue to monitor the situation.

5 Bullying at school

- If bullying is taking place at school, the foster carer should contact the school immediately to discuss the matter with the child's teacher or the designated CLA teacher.
- All schools will have an anti-bullying policy and foster carers should ask to see a copy of this. The foster carer should work jointly with the school to put a strategy in place to stop the bullying and ensure the child has access to help and support within the school.

6 Bullying in the placement

- Foster carers need to be aware of possible bullying within the placement and have effective strategies to deal with bullying behaviour. Incidents need to be recorded accurately and reported to the social workers for both children so that a plan can be put in place to tackle the issue.
- Normally, foster carers should speak with all children involved and try to resolve issues. Negative behaviour should be dealt with under the behaviour management policy. [behaviour-management-guidance.pdf](#)
- If the bullying behaviour is extreme, or normal actions do not stop the bullying, foster carers should seek advice and support from the supervising social worker and the CLA social worker.

7 Online (cyber) bullying

- Online bullying is defined as the use of ICT to deliberately hurt or upset someone. Unlike traditional physical forms of bullying, the internet allows bullying to continue past school hours and invades the victim's home life and personal space. It also allows distribution of hurtful comments and material to a wide audience. Research has shown that the impact of cyberbullying can be more intense than traditional bullying.
- Online bullying is extremely prevalent as children who would not consider bullying in the physical sense may find it easier to bully through the internet, especially if it is thought the bullying may remain anonymous. In extreme cases, online bullying could be a criminal offence.

Bullying may take the form of:

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- rude, abusive or threatening messages via email or text
- posting insulting, derogatory or defamatory statements on blogs or social networking sites
- setting up websites that specifically target the victim
- making or sharing derogatory or embarrassing videos of someone via mobile phone or email (for example, “happy slapping”).

To prevent this, foster carers should teach CLA:

- not to disclose passwords to anyone
- to only give out mobile phone numbers and email addresses to people they trust
- to only allow close friends whom they trust to have access to their social networking page
- not to respond to offensive messages
- to tell the carer about any incidents immediately.

To deal with incidents, foster carers should be vigilant about possible online bullying and how to work with internet and mobile service providers to cut down on the risk of cyberbullying:

- mobile phone companies can trace calls and ensure that any further calls and texts from that number are blocked
- internet service providers can trace messages being sent from a personal email account and can block further emails from the sender
- where bullying takes place in chat rooms, the child should leave the chat room immediately and seek advice from carers; bullying should be reported to any chat room moderator to take action
- website providers can remove comments from social networking sites and blogs and in extreme cases, can block the bully’s access to the site.
- the child could change mobile phone numbers or email addresses
- if the bullying is extreme, for example involving death threats, foster carers and social workers may consider reporting the matter to the police.

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- Information on contacting service providers in the event of online bullying can be found in the division's e-safety policy and resources folder. [multi-agency-online-safety-policy.pdf](#)

8 CLA who bully

- Often, the reasons why children become victims of bullying can be the same as those that make children bullies, so it is possible that foster carers may need to deal with CLA who bully.
- Children may bully for a variety of reasons, for example:
 - history of abuse and bullying
 - need to gain acceptance
 - not knowing or understanding about good behaviour
 - poor social skills and low self-esteem
 - acting out anxieties and aggressions during difficult periods.
- It is important for social workers and foster carers to understand the motivations for bullying in order to address the behaviour effectively. Bullying behaviour should be recorded and reported to social workers with a view to drawing up a strategy to deal with the problem. This could involve:
 - talking to the child to gain an understanding of what is driving the behaviour
 - reassuring them if they have specific fears or anxieties and looking at how to make things better
 - using behaviour management techniques to deal effectively with negative behaviour
 - helping the child to recognise how their behaviour affects the victim
 - making the child apologise or otherwise make reparations
 - considering any direct work that the child needs to overcome their bullying behaviour
 - reviewing the safe caring policy with the supervising social worker if the bullying took place in the placement
 - linking with the school if the bullying took place at school.

9 Monitoring and recording incidents

- It is important that all actual, suspected or alleged incidents of bullying and harassment are recorded in the child's daily logbook and are reported to the child's social worker and the supervising social worker.
- In particular, foster carers and supervising social workers should consider all incidents during supervision and look to see if any further training may be needed to support the foster carer.
- Some bullying behaviours may be so serious that it causes significant harm to the victim or involves a criminal offence. Where this is the case, foster carers must report the incident to the child's social worker who should inform the CLA team manager and the child's IRO. A decision will then be made regarding convening a strategy meeting under child protection procedures or notifying the police.

10 Resources for children and carers

The following websites have lots of useful information for children and their carers on bullying:

Childline:	Bullying Bullying Explore ChildLine
Kidscape:	www.kidscape.org.uk
Bullying UK:	www.bullying.co.uk
Directgov:	Dealing with bullying : Directgov - Parents
Supportline:	SupportLine - Problems: Bullying at school: Advice, support and information

Training courses on overcoming bullying will be made available to foster carers as part of core training.