



# Dealing with an allegation



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Sefton Council 

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This leaflet aims to provide information to foster families about what happens if an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against them. It also provides information about other situations where there is a concern about the boundaries of acceptable behaviour with a child.

Foster carers and their families make an enormous commitment to the children and young people they care for. They share their lives and homes with children who have undergone difficult or traumatic experiences.

Foster carers like other childcare workers can find themselves facing allegations about the quality of their care. It is always important that such allegations are taken seriously and investigated properly as experience has shown that, on rare occasions children are ill-treated by the very people who are supposed to care for them.

Becoming the subject of an allegation is always stressful for the foster carer concerned and for their family. It is likely to be particularly stressful for foster carers whose work and home life are closely linked.

The challenge for everyone involved is to ensure that children are effectively safeguarded and that their welfare is promoted while at the same time treating foster carers who are accused, fairly and honestly. When an allegation is made against a foster carer safeguarding any children the carer has contact with must be considered.

## What happens when an allegation is made?

When an allegation is made about a foster carer, the carer is likely to feel stressed and upset. The fostering service must refer the matter to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) whose role it is to offer advice in these circumstances, oversee any necessary investigation and monitor until the process is concluded.

The LADO will discuss the allegation with the fostering service and the child's social work team to consider if the foster carer/s has either:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm if they work with children; or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

If the concerns are of a criminal nature there will also be a discussion with the Police.

Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board [LSCB] provides detailed guidance to all agencies about the procedures to be followed. The agreed good practice is laid out in Sefton MBC's Allegations against Foster Carers Procedure. This is available on request from your Supervising Social worker.

## What form does the enquiry take?

There are 3 related but separate sets of enquiries which may need to take place. Each differs in terms of focus and can have different outcomes. The 3 types of enquiries are:

- Child protection enquiries, relating to the safety and welfare of any children who are or who may have been involved, or other children with whom you have regular contact.
- A police investigation into a possible criminal offence
- An investigation by the fostering service

The fostering service will aim to inform you that the allegation has been made as soon as they receive it. However, they may not be able to do this until after they have consulted with other agencies.

The LADO in conjunction with Children's Services and the Police, (if a crime may have been committed) will hold a strategy meeting to agree what type of enquiries will need to take place and what is required to safeguard any children involved, or children with whom you have regular contact. You will not be part of the strategy meeting, although your Supervising Social Worker will be or a Manager from the fostering service.

## How will I know what has been decided?

The Fostering Service will keep you informed of what type of enquiries will be carried out and the expected timescales. You can expect to be treated fairly, be informed verbally and in writing about the nature of the concerns and be informed of decisions as soon as possible.

## Where can I get support from?

Independent support can be a great help and benefit to you. This will be considered at the strategy meeting.

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 22.12 states:

*“During an investigation the fostering service makes support, which is independent of the fostering service, available to the person subject to the allegation and, where this is a foster carer, to their household, in order to provide:*

- a. Information and advice about the process
- b. Emotional support, and
- c. If needed, mediation between the foster carer and the fostering service and/or advocacy (including attendance at meetings and panel hearings)”

Sefton Fostering Service commissions Allegations Support Team (part of Fosertalk Organisations) who have social work trained advisers. You can access this support by phoning 0121 758 5013 or online [enquiries@fostertalk.org](mailto:enquiries@fostertalk.org)

Your Supervising Social Worker will continue to offer you support

## Will I be suspended from fostering whilst enquiries are ongoing?

This will be considered to safeguard any children in your care as well as to safeguard you from further allegations. The impact on the child [or children] in placement will also be a consideration.

The strategy group will need to consider, as any investigation progresses if there is cause to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, or if the allegation warrants a police investigation or if the concerns are so serious that it might be grounds for de-registration as a foster carer. As all but the most serious allegations should conclude within three months, your fostering maintenance payments will continue for 12 weeks following the allegation. After that time this will be reviewed by Team Manager if the investigation has not been concluded. Skills payments will not be paid if you do not have a child in placement

### What will the outcome be?

The outcomes considered by the strategy meeting will be:

Substantiated – there is evidence that the incident happened.

Unsubstantiated – there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation.

Unfounded – there is evidence that the incident did not happen.

Malicious – a deliberate act to deceive. For an allegation to be classified as malicious it will be necessary to have evidence which proves this intention.

## Will details of the investigation be kept on my fostering records or shared with anyone else?

It is important that the fostering service keeps details of any allegations made; details of how the allegation was investigated; the outcome and the action, on a person's confidential file.

## Good Practice in dealing with allegations

Being under investigation is always stressful, but the fostering service can help by:

- Minimising delay

- Providing you with written information
- Being open and honest
- Ensuring access to independent support

If you are unhappy about the way the investigation was conducted or the way you were treated by Children's Services, you should contact the Children's Complaints Officer.

Email: [childrenscomplaints@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:childrenscomplaints@sefton.gov.uk) Call: 0345 140 0845.

Post to:- **Children's Complaints Officer**, Magdalen House, 1st Floor, Trinity Road, Bootle L20 3NJ.

