

Bullying

STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011:

- [Regulation 11 - independent fostering agencies- duty to secure welfare.](#)

Fostering Services- National Minimum Standards

- [Standard 1 - The child's wishes and feelings and those significant to them.](#)
- [Standard 4 - Safeguarding Children.](#)

Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:

- [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer.](#)
- [Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively.](#)

RELATED GUIDANCE

- [BullyingUK](#)
- [Anti-bullying Alliance \(ABA\)](#)
- [Kidscape](#)
- [Bully Watch](#)
- [Advice for Parents and Carers on Cyberbullying \(Department for Education, 2015\)](#)
- [Bullying](#) (Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Children Procedures)

The information below will:

- Provide clear guidance to foster carers, supervising social workers, and managers on recognizing and addressing bullying.
- Minimize the incidence of bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator, among fostered children.

Recognition of Bullying: Bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour that is repeated over a period of time, making it difficult for the victims to defend themselves. It can take various forms, including physical, verbal, indirect/emotional, or cyberbullying. It is important to note that bullying can occur anywhere, including at home, outside the home, in school, and online. Single incidents of verbal or physical attacks, as well as hurtful behaviour that is not intentional, should also be taken seriously and addressed according to the principles outlined in this policy.

Some signs of bullying can be:

- Not wanting to go to school.
- Unexplained bruises.
- Torn clothing.
- Need for extra money.
- Continually losing belongings.
- Problems sleeping.
- Sudden loss of appetite.
- Problems at nursery/school/ college/placement.
- Withdrawn behaviour or temper tantrums.
- Unusually hungry at the end of the school day (lunch money being taken);
- Rushing to the bathroom after school (fear of going to the school toilets);
- Self-harming.
- Extreme emotions.

Vulnerability of Children Looked After: Children Looked After are particularly vulnerable to being bullied. Bullies often target victims by focusing on something that makes them different, which may include not living at home with their parents. Additionally, children in foster care may have additional characteristics that increase their potential for being bullied, such as having a disability, being seen as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, belonging to a particular race, religion, or culture, having experienced prior abuse and lacking self-confidence and communication skills, or being isolated from their family, peers, and support systems. Many Children Looked After experience bullying at school, in the local area and sometimes from other children in the foster home.

Bullying can include:

- Name calling and teasing.
- Threats and theft.
- Physical violence.
- Damage to belongings.
- Leaving people out of activities deliberately.
- Spreading rumours.
- Bullying by mobile phone, text message, e-mail or social networks such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Online/Cyberbullying: With the growth of technology, cyberbullying has become a significant concern. It is important for carers to be aware of their children's online activities, maintain open communication, set boundaries, and use parental controls when necessary. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is a law enforcement agency that works to protect children from online abuse.

Causes:

The bullying may be because:

- The child feels and/or appears different. School life can highlight difference, they may arrive at school by taxi, they may not be able to take part in after school clubs, and they may be withdrawn from some lessons to attend meetings.
- The child may not be achieving as well as others in their class.
- The child may have had lots of moves of carer or school.
- The child may not have a friendship group.
- The child may not want others to know that they are looked after.
- The child may feel isolated and think they have no-one to talk to at school.
- Difficult and distressing life experiences may have left the child with poor self-esteem and a lack of coping mechanisms.

Effects of Bullying:

Bullying can have a traumatic effect on children and may lead to a range of negative emotional and behavioural responses. The effects of bullying can be exacerbated by bystander/collusive behaviour, where individuals choose to ignore or deny bullying incidents, support the bully, fail to report incidents, or fail to report the involvement of others in bullying.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Everyone involved in parenting the children in the care at BfFC's IFA share a responsibility in countering bullying and creating a culture that encourages acceptable behaviour, while reducing or preventing the likelihood of bullying. Parents, carers, and families have an important role in recognizing and dealing with bullying incidents, discouraging bullying behaviour, taking an active interest in their children's activities, and watching out for signs of bullying.

Foster carers should look out for signs of bullying and should take steps to prevent it.

Your Safer Care Plan should address bullying and cover:

- Putting in place clear rules within the house that bullying is not acceptable and what actions will be taken if you suspect bullying or are told of bullying happening.
- Making it clear to children what is acceptable behaviour.
- Providing opportunities for children to think about the issue of bullying e.g., writing stories or poems or drawing pictures about bullying.
- Having discussions about bullying and why it matters.
- Being good role models as foster carers.

Prevention and Procedures:

Foster carers should create an atmosphere where bullying is known to be unacceptable and foster an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. Regular discussions about bullying should be encouraged to promote openness. In instances of bullying, carers should listen to the child or young person, take all allegations seriously, record incidents accurately, involve the child in the actions taken, and maintain communication with the child. Social workers should offer support to the child and carers, update risk assessments, involve relevant agencies, and document all incidents and outcomes.

When bullying occurs within the foster home it may be appropriate to call a meeting, preferably with the child or children, to discuss ways to prevent or reduce the bullying.

The outcomes of the meeting may include the following:

- The bully (bullies) may be asked to apologise.
- In serious cases, some form of sanction/consequences will be considered.
- If possible, the children should be encouraged to make friends.
- After the incident has been dealt with, you should monitor the situation to make sure that bullying does not happen again.

If the bullying continues, the child's social worker should be consulted as soon as possible and it may be necessary to conduct a [Placement Planning Meeting](#) or a referral may be required under the Child Protection Referrals Procedure and a [Strategy Meeting](#) should be arranged.

You must record all incidents of bullying of the child who is the alleged victim and the child who is the alleged bully.

What to do if you think your foster child is bullying or being bullied:

- Continue to act on the advice from the child's social worker and other professionals on ways to help build the child's self-esteem.
- Help the child think about what to say to help explain why they are living with foster carers.
- Encourage friendships and invite school friends' home. There is strength in numbers. Bullies may target a child who is alone.
- Build coping skills. Problem - solve difficult situations and practice what you might do.
- Do not reject a child who is a bully; reject the behaviour. Explain how the behaviour makes other children unhappy and help them develop other ways to feel better about themselves and to express how they feel.
- Give the child praise each time they help you or are kind to someone.
- Speak to the child's social worker and make an arrangement for both of you to see the child's class teacher or year head.
- Make sure that you and the other people are good role models.

Children can be reluctant to report bullying for fear of reprisal or because they think they will not be listened to. You must make a point of talking to children about bullying in order to help them report it.

Conclusion:

By implementing effective prevention strategies, providing appropriate support, and following the outlined procedures, it is possible to create a safe and supportive environment that minimizes the occurrence and impact of bullying for these vulnerable children.