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Introduction

The handbook reflects policies, procedure, and guidance for the agency and covers many common situations faced by foster carers on a day-to-day basis. It has been written in an accessible way to help you understand the sort of things that your fostering service requires of you. It has been designed for new and existing foster carers and deals with the day-to-day practicalities you may face.

The Handbook sections are accessible via the links throughout the document to our dedicated website and portal for foster carers. The full set of procedures can be accessed [Click Here](#)

The framework within which LAFL works with carers and their families and children and young people in our placements is underpinned by a range of legislation and guidance including, but not limited to:

- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 [Click Here](#)
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 [Click Here](#)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 [Click Here](#)
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 [Click Here](#)
- The Children Act 1989 and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services (2011) [Click Here](#)

Foster carers play a very important role in the lives of Children in Care and their families, so it is important that you have the necessary tools to support you with this task. The handbook is one of these tools alongside the many professionals you will work with including your Supervising Social Worker and other foster carers. We will continue to develop this handbook with you and keep it updated. This is the start of a great journey for you and the children and young people you may work with.

LAFL (Little Acorns Fostering Ltd) an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) delivers fostering services to children and carers primarily in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. We are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for the children in our care. For those children who cannot be with their birth families and for whom fostering is the plan, we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and stable foster families. so that children in our care can achieve the best possible outcomes, and live happy, healthy, and successful lives.

Please familiarise yourself with the full version of LAFL fostering service's policies, procedure, and guidance, [Click Here](#), as the handbook references some, but not all working guidance and expectations.

To access the Local Resources Pages, [Click Here](#)

Safeguarding guidance for your area can be found in:

[Click here](#) for Suffolk.

[Click Here](#) for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough.

[Click Here](#) for in Essex.

Terminology

Throughout the handbook we have used the following terms and post titles:

Children in Care	The children and young people we care for are known as Children in Care. However, you will find that the term Looked After Children is used in the legislation and statutory guidance so may appear on occasions within the manual.
Supervising Social Worker	This means the LAFL allocated, suitably qualified social worker who is responsible for supervising and supporting you.
Child's Social Worker	This means the allocated social worker from the Placing Authority who is responsible for managing the child's case.
Placing Authority	This means the local authority, children's trust or community interest company with overall responsibility for the child's care.
Placement Plan	This is the documentation drawn up by the child's social worker before the placement wherever possible (or where this is not possible, within 5 working days of the placement) which sets out in detail the arrangements for the child's care in the foster placement.

Understanding the Role of Fostering

Many foster carers would suggest that until a child is placed in your home it is difficult to understand what being a foster carer really means and, whilst we can prepare new carers during their Skills to foster training, experience does play a big part in truly understanding the role.

Children are in foster care because they cannot live with their own family, and this may be for several reasons. The objective of foster care is to provide a safe, caring, healthy and nurturing home. The foster carer can help the child or young person understand why they are looked after and help prepare them for their future.

Fostering is about shared caring, by taking someone else's child into your home. A foster carer will share the care of a child with their parents and with Children and Young People Service.

LAFL aims to provide stability and permanence in the lives of the children and young people who are placed in foster care. Through offering stability, a foster carer can play their part in developing a child's identity, ensuring their educational needs are met, helping to promote their health and wellbeing and helping children to realise their full potential.

Being a foster carer is a skilled role. It is also unique; in that it allows flexibility and room to develop your own skills. It can become a way of life, both rewarding and enjoyable. It can also be challenging. LAFL see foster carers as valuable and important members of a caring team, who often face difficult responsibilities in meeting the needs of children placed in their care.

There are many facets to caring for children and young people. We have to provide a form of care, which promotes the development, health and educational achievement of a child. In order to achieve this you will need to have the ability:

- To work closely with others.
- To communicate effectively with children.
- To provide a safe, stable and caring environment.
- To ensure that children are safe from harm or abuse.
- To work as part of a team.
- To work and communicate with others in an effective manner to ensure that the needs of a child or young person are met.
- To keep information regarding the child or young person confidential.
- To promote equality and diversity.
- To promote positive behaviour and relationships.
- To care for a child placed with you as if they were a member of your own family; and
- To promote the child's welfare, ensuring that their Care Plan is adhered to.

When you become an approved foster carer you will be asked to sign a Foster Carer Agreement, in accordance with the Fostering Regulations. The agreement will outline the expectations of you as a carer and the terms and conditions of the partnership with LAFL. In addition to describing your obligations as a foster carer, the agreement includes:

What Foster carers Can Expect from LAFL?

How many Children can you Foster?

The Annual Household Fostering Review

How to notify us of Significant Changes in Household Circumstances

Termination of Approval of a Foster Carer

Development for foster carers

Support for Foster Carers including 'Foster Talk' Membership - [Click Here](#)

Training and Development

Training and development are a vital part of the role of a foster carer.

We recognise that it may not always be easy for foster carers to attend training events due to childcare, work commitments and travel. For this reason, we encourage on-line training which can be completed in the home at times and pace suitable to foster carers. We currently subscribe to a comprehensive range of web-based courses designed specifically for foster carers.

Development can also occur through reading or research which you can discuss with your supervising social worker to demonstrate your learning. You can also use the handbook to support your learning and development, particularly in relation to meeting the induction standards.

Department for education Training, Support and Development standards for Foster Carers

All foster carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards within the first 12-18 months of being approved as a foster carer.

The standards are part of a national strategy supported by the Department for Education (DfE) for raising the profile of foster carers as valued professionals and improving and standardising services for children in care.

For more information on the Training Support and Development Standards [Click Here](#)

To see the Foster Carer Standards evidence workbook [Click Here](#)

Children's Rights

The Children Act (1989) places great emphasis on the rights, wishes and feelings of children. Wakefield Children and Young People Service is of the firm belief that all children placed with any foster carer have a right to:

- Protection from any form of violence, including physical/mental abuse and corporal punishment.
- Protection from bullying, ridicule, and emotional abuse.
- Protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
- Live in an environment that acknowledges their ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality, and any disability.
- Develop their own sense of identity and family history.
- Be encouraged to value their own language, food, clothing, and hair styles.
- Live within a warm and caring environment where their rights to privacy and confidentiality will be acknowledged.
- Be consulted about their wishes and feelings regarding their care plan and placement.
- Make a complaint.
- Live within a home that will meet their health and safety needs, to include the right to consent or refuse medical examinations (this is dependent on age and understanding);
- Appropriate, accurate information and advice regarding, drugs, alcohol, smoking, relationships and sex education.
- An independent visitor if a child has little or no contact with family, friends.

Working with Parents and 'Contact'

The Children Act stresses the importance of family contact and encourages all plans for the child or young person to work towards returning home, where this is an agreed and realistic aim. Foster carers have a crucial role in this process.

There should be contact between a child and their parents, but in some cases a Local Authority may decide that contact is not in the child's best interest. This will only happen if specific incidents

have taken place or if there is a risk to a child's wellbeing. Where there are concerns about contact issues, these must be addressed through the child's social worker and, if needed, legal advice will be sought.

Contact can present challenges such as:

- Venues, times, transport, communicating arrangements to others.
- The child may be in care against parent's wishes; this may lead to tensions during contact.
- A foster carer may feel anxious about meeting the child's parents. In some cases, it will be a support worker who facilitates contact;
- Contact does on occasions take place in the home of a foster carer.

A foster carer can help a child to cope with anxieties or any mixed feelings and the changes to routine that contact can sometimes create. Difficulties within contact will not be resolved by stopping it, but rather by working through any the difficulties, which may mean all parties negotiating and drawing up a contact plan. It is important that foster carers do not withdraw contact as a means of a sanction, as it is a child's right to have contact and children should not be punished for something usually beyond their control.

Contact plays an important part in the plan to rehabilitate a child back to their parents and different arrangements will exist for each situation. Contact arrangements will be discussed when a child is placed with the foster carer.

Contact can include significant people outside of the family e.g. childminder, teacher, school friends. It is important to maintain these links within the community. This could be particularly important for accommodated unaccompanied asylum seekers, where there may be no relatives/friends in this country. An independent visitor could fulfil this role for a child. An Independent Visitor is appointed by the Local Authority to befriend a child in the area.

Court Orders

Many children that come into care are subject to a form of order. At times this can be confusing for foster carers but when making any order the guiding principle of the Children Act is that the welfare of the child is paramount.

Care Order

A Care Order places the Child in care of the Local Authority. The Local Authority acquires parental responsibility. A Care Order will remain in place until the Child is 18 years of age unless the order is discharged or replaced with a different order.

Interim Care Order

An Interim Care Order can be made in Care Proceedings and has the same effect as a full Care Order while it lasts. The local authority therefore acquires Parental Responsibility for the child under the Interim Care Order.

There is no limit to the number of interim care orders that can be made.

Emergency Protection Order

An Emergency Protection Order gives to the person who applied the power to remove a child at immediate risk to a 'safe' place. It can also be used to prevent the child from being removed from a 'safe' place. It also gives the applicant parental responsibility whilst the order is in place.

Police Powers of Protection

This is similar to an Emergency Protection Order but enables the police to remove the child to a 'safe' place. A child can be removed under Police Powers for up to 72 hours.

Children Act Section 20 Accommodation

The Local Authority can accommodate a child on a voluntary basis. For example, a parent may need hospital treatment and the children may need a period of time being looked after by foster carers. Under Section 20 the Local Authority has not been granted Parental Responsibility so the parent of the child still retains all rights.

Court Evidence

Occasionally, foster carers may be required to provide court evidence during care proceedings. The evidence may be regarding observations around parental contact with the child, child's behaviour within the home and direct knowledge of disclosures of abuse. It is acknowledged that that on these occasions it can be very anxious time for foster carers. The child's social worker and fostering supervising social worker will work closely with you at this time.

It is important that foster carers keep accurate records of incidents/issues as this may be useful evidence in Court. It will also assist you in recalling information that may need to be shared. You will have received log sheets from your supervising social worker.

Record Keeping

Every record will be different, and we recognise that some carers may feel some anxiety about doing it right or wondering what to write. Your supervising social worker will provide guidance and support in this but we have provided as a guide some hints and tips below.

Basic Record Keeping

- Be accurate.
- Be factual.
- Be confidential.
- Share information only with people involved with the child.
- Keep records up to date.
- If caring for more than one child, keep individual records on each.
- Record positives as well as negatives.
- Ensure records are factual; please do not be judgemental.

Why you should Keep a Record?

- To help you recall events/incidents accurately.
- To help recall positive and negative events/incidents.

- To assist yourself and others in assessing the progress of a placement.
- To assist yourself and others in making decisions at Looked After Reviews.
- Record keeping will support an application for additional support for a child.
- Record keeping will help protect you and family members if allegations or complaints are made against you.

How should I Keep Records?

- Use the LAFL website log portal in which you can make individual recordings of a child.
- Keep any paper records in a secure place, e.g., secure cupboard or drawer.
- You only need to write enough information to portray an incident or event.
- Inform a child that you will keep a record whilst in placement.

What Do I Do with my Records?

- Keep any paper records in a safe place.
- A child has a right to confidentiality so ensure no other person has access to them. For detailed information in respect of confidentiality [Click Here](#)
- Share information only with others involved with the child.
- Records can help you when completing the consultation paper for the Looked After Review/Child in Care Review.
- Once the online logs have been completed the supervising social worker will review and authorise them online.
- A court can request records. This is why it is helpful to have individual records on each child.

What Do I Share with my Family?

- Remember a child has rights to confidentiality and consider their feelings.
- Some information can be shared with your family e.g. sexualised behaviour as you need to ensure levels of safe caring but this must be on a need to know basis;
- Your family do not have the right to access any placement records.

Allegations of Abuse

Managing Disclosures

Before a child is placed it is sometimes known or suspected that the child has been abused. If this information is known by the social workers, then this must be shared with you.

Sometimes this information has not been discovered prior to a placement being made. Please remember that a child may not talk about their experiences of abuse until they feel they are in a safe home and a child may disclose information of abuse at the most unexpected of times and this can take the carers off guard.

If a child does make an allegation of past abuse, there are some important things to remember:

- Never prompt the child or ask leading questions.
- Allegations can be used in court as evidence; if a child has been questioned or prompted in any way then the court could disregard this evidence.
- Listen to the child and allow them to speak freely.
- Let them say everything they have to say in a caring environment.
- Comfort the child if they are distressed.
- Do not be judgemental as children are the victims of abuse.
- Wait for a suitable time and write everything down.
- Keep your recordings factual.
- Do not record your own opinions.
- Wait for a suitable time and contact the child's social worker and your supervising social worker.
- Maintain the family's normal routine, if possible, as this will have been a big step for the child.

If a Child Discloses to your own Children?

- Do not question the fostered child after the disclosure.
- Write down what your child has said and advise them not to talk about this to other people.
- Comfort your child if they are distressed.
- Inform the child's social worker and your supervising social worker at a convenient opportunity.

We will offer support to you throughout this time, as needed, as a disclosure is confidential, sometimes stressful and needs to be managed appropriately. You must not promise the child you will keep this information to yourself. This can often be very difficult as a child may feel you have broken their trust and, again, we will offer support and training around these issues. Do not be afraid to ask for support at this time.

If it is outside office hours, contact the Out of Hours service on **01440 732019**.

Allegations of Abuse Against Carers

It is an unfortunate fact that on rare occasions foster carers may find themselves subject to an allegation from a child in their care or a referral from a member of the public or a professional person. This allegation may be about physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.

The nature of foster care means that carers are often uniquely vulnerable to such allegations. For this reason we have 'safe caring' policies which seek to ensure that circumstances which may lead to allegations are identified and controlled in advance.

Although some allegations are false and may be related to the child's own experiences and situation, some have also turned out to be true. For this reason, allegations will always be treated seriously. However, neither will we pre-judge carers who are the subject of an allegation and we

follow a set and very fair procedure. Despite this, we know that this can be a worrying and anxious time for foster carers, their families and the child involved.

Carers will be advised to contact Foster Talk for any support or legal advice that they may need. In particular circumstances we will also purchase further specific and personal independent support from Foster Talk. There are support arrangements for a child making an allegation.

Most concerns or allegations will mean an Allegation Management Meeting is held ([Click here](#) for more information)

Once the Allegation Management Meeting has decided on what course of action is needed. The carer will be notified of any allegation or concern, if not already aware, as soon as possible by the Fostering Service.

However, depending on the nature of the allegation, there may be times when more enquiries are made before the carer can be advised of the specific detail of the allegation. The carer may need to be interviewed and this may be a single or joint interview by the child's social worker and/or LAFL. In the event that the child or children have to be placed with another carer whilst the investigation is ongoing, the carer may still receive the fee element of the allowance. The decision and timescale for the payment to be received will be advised by the service. A letter will be sent outlining this course of action.

When there has been an Allegation Management Meeting in relation to a foster carer this will often result in an early Fostering Review being held and in some cases the matter will be referred to the Fostering Panel. In some cases, the allegation may mean that the LAFL will take the decision to terminate the approval of the foster carer.

Professional roles & responsibility – in brief

Social Worker

Foster carers will have dealings with a number of professionals involved in the child's life. The role of LAFL and the children's social work team can be confusing, but it is important to note that whilst they are two different roles, the overall goal is promoting good outcomes for children in your care. The teams work closely together and will at times undertake joint visits to foster carers to discuss aspects of a care plan.

Under the Children Act, Local Authorities are required to provide every child in foster care with an allocated social worker. These will usually be from the Children in Care Teams but could be from the Initial response or Family Support Teams if the child has only recently come into care.

The child's social worker has a statutory responsibility to visit the placement within the first week of a child being placed there and then at least once every 6 weeks. Once a placement has been agreed as a long-term placement usually following a 12-month period the frequency of the visits will be less and these will be agreed within the review process.

The child's social worker will be responsible for the overall planning for the child and is supervised by a team manager from within their area. At the point of a child being placed, or during any change over of social worker, it is important for foster carers to know the name of the child's allocated social worker and their team manager and any emergency numbers for the Local Authority.

If a child does not have an allocated worker, it is important for foster carers to obtain the name of a duty social worker/team that are dealing with the child. If a social worker is not in the office, foster carers will need to leave a message or speak with the team manager. If neither is available, ask to speak to someone on duty.

In some cases, you may need to contact the LAFL duty worker or your supervising social worker. We would always encourage this, as we need to ensure that information is relayed as soon as possible, and this also provides the foster carer with another avenue of communication if the child's social worker or team is not available.

The child's social worker will establish a pattern of regular contact with the foster carer and child. The frequency of visits will vary in each case. There are times when a social worker will have to visit more frequently than every 6 weeks; visits will be discussed beforehand with the foster carer.

A social worker will also need to talk with a child or young person alone.

The social worker for the child will play an important role as a link with the child's family; the social worker will arrange contact visits with the child's parents, relatives or friends. These contact arrangements will be discussed with the foster carer.

Supervising Social Worker

Once you are approved, LAFL will allocate you a supervising social worker.

LAFL is not directly involved in the care planning of the children in your care as this is why the child has a social worker. LAFL and the child's social worker do work closely together as the main goal is to achieve positive outcomes for looked after children. There might be times when joint visits are needed to a placement.

LAFL tries to ensure that carers are visited every 4 weeks. There will also be at least one unannounced visit every 12 months but in some cases, these may be undertaken more frequently. We have a statutory duty, as does the child's social worker, to see a child's bedroom.

During the visit, the Supervising Social Worker will carry out 'supervision' which is a discussion with you about your role as foster carers. We have a supervision contract for carers, which defines what will be discussed in supervision and a Supervision Form which the worker will use to make a record of the supervision session. You will receive a copy of this.

Health and Wellbeing

In accordance with The Children Act & The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011, LAFL sets out its guidelines and requirements for medical issues and promoting healthy lifestyles for all children placed with foster carers.

There are five key outcomes for children and young people. These are:

Staying Safe

- Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence, and sexual exploitation.
- Safe from accidental injury and death.

- Safe from bullying and discrimination.
- Safe from crime and anti-social behaviour, in and out of school.
- Having security, stability and being cared for.
- Parents, carers, and families provide safe and stable homes.

Being Healthy

- Physically healthy.
- Mentally and emotionally healthy.
- Sexually healthy.
- Healthy lifestyles.
- Choose not to take illegal drugs.
- Parents, carers, and families promote healthy choices.

Enjoying and Achieving

- Ready for school.
- Attend and enjoy school.
- Achieve educational standards at primary school.
- Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation.
- Achieve educational standards at secondary school.
- Parents, carers and families promote and support learning.

Making a Positive Contribution

- Engage in decision making and support the community and environment.
- Engage in law abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school.
- Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully and discriminate.
- Develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges.
- Parents, carers, and families promote positive behaviour.

Achieving Economic Well Being

- Engage in further education, employment, or training on leaving school.
- Be ready for employment.
- Live in decent homes and sustainable communities.
- Know how to access transport and material goods.
- Parents, carers and families are supported to be economically active.

Foster Carers Can Help Achieve the Five Outcomes in many Ways. For Example:

- Being aware child protection and the need to safeguard children.
- Encouraging children to eat well and lead healthy lifestyles.
- Actively encouraging children in their hobbies and education.
- Helping children develop good friendships and show kindness and respect to others.
- Promote contact with family.
- Promote activities and hobbies for children.
- Provide a positive environment.

Healthy Lifestyles

It is important that foster carers give attention to the positive promotion of healthy lifestyles. Foster carers must be good role models and demonstrate a healthy lifestyle and provide a healthy environment. This can be achieved through encouraging children to take physical exercise, raising the importance of healthy dietary needs and avoiding health risks such as high fat/high sugar diets, smoking, alcohol or drugs.

Foster carers will need to recognise that a child placed in their care may come with a different cultural view of their dietary needs. Foster carers should be flexible and find a balance between maintaining the young person's identity and what is best for the carer's own family, introducing new foods as appropriate. There is information available for foster carers on the dietary needs of children, including cultural and religious diets.

Some children may be unable to express their feelings verbally and can use food to show signs of distress. Comfort eating and overeating can lead to obesity. Equally, eating disorders can lead to extreme weight loss. Both these situations can be worrying and difficult to manage. If there are any concerns, then a foster carer should discuss these with the child's social worker and also their supervising social worker.

All foster carers need to ensure that any children placed in their care are appropriately protected from the sun, even in windy weather conditions when the sun is present. When outdoors, sun block cream should be applied and re-applied on a regular basis throughout the day. One application of sun block is not enough to protect from harmful rays or a wind factor. Sun hats should also be worn as an additional means of protection. For babies and toddlers who require prams or pushchairs please ensure there is adequate cover when they are sat outside for periods in their pram or pushchair.

Medical and Health Issues

At the point of initial referral for a child to be placed the child's social worker (or duty social worker) will establish as much background information regarding the health needs of the child and share these with the foster carer. The duty social worker will also establish any current medication and health appointments that are in place. If regular hospital appointments are in place and/or there are specific medical needs, the social worker can liaise with the appropriate medical professionals to establish if any training may be necessary for the carer prior to a child being placed. On occasions there may be an emergency placement and current medical needs may not be fully established, in such cases the supervising social worker will liaise with the child's social worker to establish this as soon as possible.

Smoking

Coram BAAF guidance outlines that children under five years of age should not be placed with carers who smoke.

LAFI has adhered to this guidance when we have approved new foster carers. However, due to the risk involved in second hand smoke we do advise all foster carers not to smoke in the presence of children and young people placed in their care. Where possible we ask that foster carers identify a designated place in the home or outside to smoke. It is also important that foster carers provide a good role model to children in their care. We know that some young people in care, like other young people, will smoke. You should never encourage this or give a child cigarettes or smoke with a child. You should also be aware that it is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to buy cigarettes so must not support or condone this.

Coram BAAF in 2018 issued updated guidance relating to e-cigarettes. [Click Here](#)

LAFI Smoking Policy and Guidance - For more information [Click Here](#)

Statutory Medical Checks

All Children in Care are subject to an annual Health Needs Assessment and the child's social worker will arrange for this to take place with a Looked After Children's Nurse. Foster carers have a statutory duty to ensure that the child's Health Assessment is undertaken when requested by the social worker.

Registering with a G.P.

The child's social worker will provide details of previous G. P. The foster carer should then register the child with their G. P if necessary.

Dentist and Opticians

The social worker will also discuss any dental needs. If appointments with dentists or orthodontists have been made, then the foster carer should ensure that these appointments are maintained.

If a child has not received dental treatment for some time, then the foster carer should book a dental appointment at the earliest opportunity. Follow up treatment and regular check-ups should be arranged on a 6 monthly basis.

All health services have specific duties to Children in Care and so should generally be helpful. If you are experiencing difficulties in securing an appointment, please notify the child's social worker as soon as possible.

Emergencies and Admission to Hospital

If a child is admitted to hospital or has an accident, then the foster carer should attend to the medical need as a priority and then report to the child's social worker and their supervising social worker. If a hospital admission or emergency treatment is needed after our hours, please inform the OOO LAFI worker who will agree who should notify EDT (Emergency Duty Team) for the relevant placing authority.

Foster carers should notify their supervising social worker of a serious illness or serious contagious disease as OFSTED (the government body which regulates and inspects foster care) has to be notified of this.

Managing Placements

Information that carers should have when a child is first placed.

The social worker has to provide a current risk assessment, which includes any concerns from the family.

Placement information record that includes:

- Name of child.
- Date of birth.
- Address of carers.
- GP address and name.
- Some details of child's routines if possible.
- Contact arrangements.
- Consent signed by parents re medical or delegated medical authority from the LA.
- Signed by carers to agree to take child.

If it is appropriate and available a copy of the child's care plan although this might not be readily available at the point of admission or if it is an emergency placement. If possible, the referral information which has details of other family networks and/or some background information on family and reasons for placement.

For older children 16+ carers should have copy of the pathway plan.

Placement plan: This will be undertaken with your supervising fostering social worker and where possible the child's social worker. This outlines the child's needs and the foster carers roles and responsibilities in meeting all identified needs. Depending on the age of the child it is important that they also contribute to the placement plan.

If foster carers do not receive this relevant information and or feel they need more information in relation to the child's needs, then they must contact their supervising social worker or LAFL duty worker immediately so that this can be followed up.

Absence from Placement and Holiday Arrangements

Foster carers should always discuss proposed absences with the child's social worker, particularly if this involves an overnight stay, as the social worker has to be notified about this.

It is important that Children in Care are given the same opportunities as their peers and this may mean staying over with friends, for example. LAFL wishes to encourage and support this but it is important that this is conveyed to the social worker in case of any emergency situation arising.

Respite Care

In the event that you need respite for a child in your care, LAFL must be notified along with the child's social work team. The need for respite provision will be discussed at the start of the placement and will usually be dictated by the child's individual needs. However, respite should not be used as a means of a sanction for behavioural issues. The purpose of respite is to cover holiday arrangements, medical issues or as a support to a placement where this has been identified as

being needed to sustain the placement. LAFL must manage all respite arrangements, as it is important that we know the placement that a child is going to and who will be caring for the child.

Holidays

We want children in care to have the same experiences as other young people, which includes going on family holidays. In the event that you are travelling abroad with a Looked After child then you will need a letter of consent from the child's social worker as passport control may ask for this.

For all holidays it might be likely that the parents' permission is needed so all holiday arrangements must be discussed with the child's social worker. You must also be mindful of the impact on any contact arrangements that the child may have. Therefore, prior notice is usually needed so this can be discussed with a parent/carer, as alternative contact arrangements might be needed.

Any holidays which are arranged must be in the school holidays, as permission will not be given to take a child out of school during term time unless there are truly exceptional circumstances. This current guidance is not just applicable to looked after children but all children of school age.

Missing from Placement

Unfortunately, some young people may sometimes leave placements for short or longer periods. If we know where the young person is, this is classed as 'unauthorised absence'. If we do not know where the young person is it is classed as 'missing from care'. We take all such absences very seriously and will always make strenuous efforts, in partnership with the police, to ensure that young people are first of all safe and then returned to placement. It is important that all such absences are recorded, and the information shared with LAFL.

Stability/Disruption Meetings

Placement stability is very important to outcomes for Children in Care. If a placement is breaking down, or in fact breaks down, we will hold a Stability Meeting to determine the causes for this and any resulting actions that may be necessary to prevent a repeat of this either for the child or the foster carers. The foster care will be involved in this meeting.

Giving Notice on Placements

Again, because of the importance of placement stability, we ask that carers persevere through difficulties in long-term placements and will offer every support for this. Most difficulties can be resolved through joint working and support to the placement but where a carer really feels unable to continue to care for a particular child or children, we ask that 28 days' notice is given (unless there is an overriding reason for an urgent move) to allow us to match the child to another carer and plan and prepare for a move properly.

Bullying

Signs of Bullying

Bullying can have a very negative effect on the lives of any children.

Foster carers often feel guilty and confused that they have not recognised that a child in care is being bullied or is bullying as a lot of children who are being bullied or bully are often very good at hiding their feelings.

The first sign may be that a child suddenly does not want to go to school or says that they are ill when PE lessons are on the agenda.

Other indicative situations that can occur include:

- Losing dinner money.
- Falling out with previously good friends.
- Being moody and bad tempered.
- Being quiet and withdrawn.
- Wanting to avoid leaving the house.
- Doing less well in school.
- Anxiety.
- Coming home with cuts/bruises.
- Torn clothes.
- Asking for stolen possessions to be replaced.

Cyberbullying

Cyber bullying is any form of bullying which takes place online or through smartphones and tablets. Social networking sites, messaging apps, gaming sites and chat rooms such as Facebook, Xbox Live, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and other chat rooms can be great fun and a positive experience but equally things can go wrong. There are many ways of bullying someone online and for some it can take shape in more ways than one.

Some of the types of cyber bullying are:

Harassment - This is the act of sending offensive, rude, and insulting messages and being abusive. Nasty or humiliating comments on posts, photos and in chat rooms. Being explicitly offensive on gaming sites.

Denigration – This is when someone may send information about another person that is fake, damaging and untrue. Sharing photos of someone for the purpose to ridicule, spreading fake rumours and gossip. This can be on any site online or on apps. We even hear about people altering photos of others and posting in online for the purpose of bullying.

Flaming – This is when someone is purposely using extreme and offensive language and getting into online arguments and fights. They do this to cause reactions and enjoy the fact it causes someone to get distressed.

Impersonation – This is when someone will hack into someone's email or social networking account and use the person's online identity to send or post vicious or embarrassing material to/about others. The making up of fake profiles on social network sites, apps and online are commonplace and it can be difficult to get them closed down.

Outing and Trickery – This is when someone may share personal information about another or trick someone into revealing secrets and forward it to others. They may also do this with private images and videos too.

Cyber Stalking – This is the act of repeatedly sending messages that include threats of harm, harassment, intimidating messages, or engaging in other online activities that make a person afraid for his or her safety. The actions may be illegal too depending on what they are doing.

Exclusion – This is when others intentionally leave someone out of a group such as group messages, online apps, gaming sites and other online engagement. This is also a form of social bullying and a very common.

Tips and advice for young people

- Keep safe by using unusual passwords. Use a combination of letters, lowercase, uppercase, symbols and numbers. Don't use any part of your name or email address and don't use your birth date either because that's easy for people who know you to guess. Don't let anyone see you signing in and if they do, change the password as soon as you can.
- If you are using a public computer such as one in a library, computer shop, or even a shared family computer, be sure to sign out of any web service you are using before leaving the computer so that you can protect your privacy.
- Being bullied online can affect someone enormously. Being bullied can impact on a person's self-esteem, confidence and social skills. Some children affected by this type of bullying, have had to leave school, work and social networks to escape bullying. Always consider the impact your words may have and think twice before posting.
- Think twice before you post anything online because once it's out there you can't take it back. It is easy for any comments or posts you make online to be taken out of context and these could be damaging to you in the long term.

Read more about digital footprints and how this can affect your life both online and offline. [Click here](#)

For access to a broad website site with comprehensive resources for children and adults that are very informative, easy to use, and up to date [Click Here](#)

Carers may have to be more vigilant of children's behaviour as it can be difficult to separate out behaviour that stems from the children's background and behaviour that stems from being bullied.

LAFI recognises that it is essential for a foster carer to have as much knowledge of the child's background and behaviour before or at the start of a placement.

Angry reactions to bullying may further damage the child or young person. If a foster carer did not know the child was being bullied or a bully then other people may not have realised it either.

If a foster carer thinks that a child is being bullied or is a bully then they must discuss the issue with their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. The foster carer and social worker will put a plan in place to gather information, which will help build up a picture of evidence.

Taking Action

The child's social worker is responsible for following through any issues or action plan put in place due to concerns around bullying. Foster carers and social workers have a duty of care, and allowing a child to be continually bullied when they have been alerted to the problem could be seen as a breach of that duty.

Supporting the Child

At this stage the foster carer should be able to support and comfort the child in the home setting. The process of dealing with bullying can be stressful for children who may feel that they will get into further trouble with the bully or feel guilty for causing more trouble for the social worker or the foster carer.

If Bullying Continues

The plan may work for a time, but the child may begin to suffer from bullying again. Foster carers should be available to support and comfort the child.

If you believe that the bullying has started again you should contact the child's social worker, also your supervising social worker. Keep a diary of what the child says is happening.

Behaviour Management

This section outlines the principles of good practice and effective methods of care and control techniques. LAFL aims to equip carers with the skills and awareness they need to provide children in their care with a safe, nurturing and encouraging environment, which will enable them to reach their full potential and grow into responsible adults.

- Carers should seek to achieve a balance between care and control. The child should be offered a nurturing environment with firm boundaries. This should enable the child to develop a sense of care, security and personal responsibility which will allow them to become mature, sensible adults.
- Through the use of effective care and control policies, children are able to make choices and take responsibility for their behaviour, in the context of a caring and trusting relationship. Methods of care and control are always applicable when children are being looked after but there are certain methods which are particularly useful in dealing with challenging behaviour.
- As all children are unique and have different life experiences, there is a need for Foster Carers to have maximum flexibility in the care they provide. Many children who are fostered have been victims of various forms of abuse and carers must have regard for these experiences at all times when caring for them and managing their behaviour.
- Every child who is looked after has a right to have their needs (in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability, and sexuality) respected. This must be considered when exercising care and control.

Whilst there is an expectation that carers will provide a warm and nurturing environment at all times whilst setting appropriate boundaries around behaviour, it is acknowledged that there will be times when some form of sanction and control will be necessary because of unacceptable behaviour. Any sanction or control used in the foster home must be:

- Compatible with what is recognised as good practice in the care of children.
- Related to the individual's care plan, age and circumstances.
- Realistic and sensitive.
- Enforceable
- Consistent Sanctions which may be considered are as follows (although there is no implication that carers should be using sanctions, nor is this list exhaustive):
- Reparation (the act or process of making amends)
- Restitution (the act of giving back something which has been stolen)
- Time out (giving space and privacy when it is safe to give the young person time to calm down and think things through) or a cooling off period.
- Early to bed
- Grounding
- Delaying treats • Increased supervision
- Extra tasks

Acceptable sanctions should be relevant, used sparingly and follow the unacceptable behaviour as quickly as possible.

Sanctions which are Unacceptable

LAFI expects all its' Foster Carers to comply with the Children Act 1989 which sets out the prohibition of the following forms of discipline:

- Those which intentionally or unintentionally humiliate a child / young person or causes them to be ridiculed.
- Use of accommodation to physically restrict the liberty of any child – except in situations when the child is in danger.
- The use of corporal or physical punishments
- Withholding of food or drinks
- Prevention of visits with family or friends
- Forcing a child to wear distinctive or inappropriate clothes.
- Unauthorised use of medication (this includes alternative medicines)
- Withholding of prescribed medication
- The imposition of fines (money)
- Any intimate physical examination

Intentional deprivation of sleep

- Curtailment of savings

- Withholding pocket money without the permission of the child's Social Worker
- No child must be kept in any form of isolation in consequence of his/her behaviour. If it is necessary for isolation to be used for other reasons, then it must only be with close adult supervision i.e. time out.

Recording the Use of Sanctions

Foster Carers should record in their LAFL daily/weekly log sanctions which have been used, why they were used, and the child / young person's reaction. Where, due to unforeseen circumstances, carers have used sanctions which were not previously agreed it is particularly important that they should record the events and the sanctions used for discussion later with the child's Social Worker, their Supervising Social Worker, the child / young person, and where appropriate, their parent.

The Supervising Social Worker will give advice, direction and support to Foster Carers on the recording and reporting of incidents, and support carers who have behaved in the interests of the child's welfare when complaints are received from parents about the sanctions used. All sanctions should be regularly monitored and reviewed through monthly supervision as to their usefulness and effectiveness. If it is thought that an inappropriate sanction has been used, the Supervising Social Worker will talk this through with the carer and look at alternative strategies which might have been used in the circumstances.

Continued use of inappropriate sanction(s) would need to be addressed through a review of the carer(s) but where the use of inappropriate sanctions places a child at harm or risk of harm it may be deemed to be a safeguarding issue and referred under Child Protection Procedures to the LADO.

Restraint

It is our policy not to place children who we feel will be difficult to manage without carers resorting to physical restraint. This is considered carefully as part of the matching process. We believe that it is not appropriate or desirable for carers to need to use restraint on a regular basis. As an agency we feel that physical restraint should never be advocated as a standard method of managing behaviour.

You will find a comprehensive foster care behaviour management policy and guidance documents in the online portal carers page [Click Here](#)

Please familiarise yourselves with these documents.

Complaints

To access LAFL policy and Procedure in respect of complaints [Click Here](#)

A child, a parent or carer of a child, a foster carer or anyone else for whom the Agency has agreed to provide a service can make a complaint under this procedure. Individuals are also able to make complaints on behalf of others if it is considered they have "sufficient interest" to do so. Children will be encouraged to take up issues in the most appropriate way and they will be supported to do this. If it is possible to identify a way forward with a complaint which is informal and therefore easily resolved, this should be the best way forward.

It is the responsibility of foster carers and LAFL staff to help children to deal with their complaints sympathetically and actively, whether the complaint is about the LAFL or the placing authority. Anyone making a complaint is also able to withdraw their complaint at any stage.

FYI here are some Important Contacts Children can be directed to;

Children's Commissioner for England

Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

[Help at Hand](#) - free, confidential support and advice for Children in Care, living away from home or working with Children's Services. **Tel:** 0800 528 0731 (free phone number)

E-mail: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is intended to cover concerns that fall outside of issues dealt with under the Complaints procedure.

Definition:

Whistleblowing is when someone passes on information, which they reasonably believe shows wrongdoing or a cover-up by that organisation. For example, the information may be about activity that is illegal or that creates risks to the health and safety of others. The concern may relate to something that has happened, is happening or that a person may fear will happen in the future. You should inform your Supervising Social Worker if you have any serious concerns or come across any wrongdoing. If the concern is about your Supervising Social Worker, you should speak to a manager within the fostering service.

Before making a disclosure, or at any time during the process, you can contact support organisations for advice – see below. The decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal. Harassment, bullying or victimisation of a “Whistleblower” will not be tolerated. You should raise concerns confidentially or openly and without fear of any comeback.

You should record your concerns giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why you are concerned. If you do not feel able to do this, the member of staff you speak to will make a written record of their conversation. Concern should be expressed as soon as possible.

The concern could be about something that:

- Is unlawful or illegal; or

- Is a miscarriage of justice; or
- Against the organisation's policies
- Falls below established standards or practice; or
- Amounts to improper conduct; or
- Endangers the health and safety of any person; or
- Attempts to conceal any of the above.

The issue will be looked into and an internal enquiry of formal investigation will take place. You will be advised what will happen next, the likely timescale and arrangements made for contacting you and keeping you informed. You will be informed of the outcome (there may be restrictions on this to maintain confidentiality for other people). If you are not happy with the outcome, you can raise this with the LAFL Registered Manager who deals with complaints or LAFL's Responsible Individual. If you feel that your concern has not been satisfactorily addressed and that there are no further avenues for pursuing the matter within LAFL, then you can make a disclosure to a prescribed external body, including:

Children's Commissioner for England

Contact them about matters relating to the rights, welfare, and interests of children in England.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

E-mail: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Ofsted

Contact them about matters relating to regulation and inspection of children's social care.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 3155

E-mail: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

Contact them about matters relating to child welfare and protection.

NSPCC
Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH

Tel: 0800 028 0285 This phonenumber is staffed 365 days a year:

- Mon-Fri (incl. bank holidays) 8am to 10pm;
- Weekends 9am to 6pm.

E-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/whistleblowing-advice-line/

The Health and Safety Executive

Contact them about the health and safety of individuals at work, or the health and safety of the public arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work.

Tel: 0300 003 1647

Online form: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm

Social Work England

Contact them about matters relating to the registration and fitness to practise of a social worker.

1 North Bank
Blonk Street
Sheffield,
S3 8JY

Tel: +44 (0)808 196 2274

E-mail: enquiries@socialworkengland.org.uk

Website: socialworkengland.org.uk

It is important to note - If you raise concerns which are found to be malicious, a review of your approval may happen.

Concerns which come under another procedure e.g., Child Protection will normally be referred and dealt with under the Local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Procedures. Where you consider that a child protection matter has arisen within LAFL and has not been dealt with appropriately, you can make a disclosure under this Whistleblowing procedure, or make a report to the relevant local authority or to Ofsted (contact details as above).