

CHILD PROTECTION / SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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Introduction

Regional Foster Families are committed to protecting children

Regional Foster Families is an independent fostering agency that recruits, trains and assesses foster carers to look after children placed by local authorities. Once children and young people are placed with our foster carers we are dedicated to providing a service that is child centred and serves the interest of each and every child. In order to do this, we must provide environments that keep children and young people safe from harm and abuse.

The application and scope of our child protection and safeguarding policy covers both staff and carers.

Regional Foster Families Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy outlines the policy and procedures adopted by the organisation as required by the following legislation and guidance:

1. Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011)
2. Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (2011)
3. Children's Act (2004) as amended by the Children and Social Work Act (2017)
4. Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006)
5. Working together to Safeguard Children (2010, 2013, 2015 and 2018)
6. Children and Young Person's Act (2008)
7. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)

In line with legislation and guidance, Regional Foster Families is committed within all aspects of practice to ensuring the highest quality of child centred service possible. We seek to promote and protect the rights of children: both those placed within our service and those who are part of fostering households. As such, strong safeguarding practice is the cornerstone of our service.

In particular the organisation is clear that safeguarding children (the action we take to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm) is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children has a role to play (Working together 2018). The key to good practice is the development of a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings. This is echoed through the organisational commitment to quality training and supervision of both staff and foster carers.

This policy should be read in conjunction with policies and procedures and other information on child protection / safer caring as listed at the end. See 'Essential Reading'.

As well as providing a clear organisational commitment to protect children from harm and abuse the policy will enable all staff and foster carers to know what to do if they are worried about a child and help the organisation to be as safe as possible for children.

Values and Principles

Regional Foster Families adhere to a set of values and principles which must be followed and evidenced in all work undertaken by staff and foster carers in their work with children. These principles when properly embedded in practice, understood and applied can help to ensure children are properly safeguarded:

1. Child Centred Approach

“The child’s welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care” (NMS, 2011).

Regional Foster Families are committed to a child centred approach. Children and young people need to feel valued and respected and their views need to be heard. We will always consider the best interests of any child making them our focus and priority.

2. Multi Agency Working

In accordance with Working Together (2015 and 2018), Regional Foster Families are committed to working fully in partnership with all agencies to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded effectively. “Strong, effective multi-agency arrangements are ones that are responsive to local circumstances and engage the right people” Working Together (2018),

3. Recruitment and Selection

The agency has a rigorous policy and staff training in place to deter potential perpetrators. This relates to part time and full time staff and volunteers. Regional Managers are required to attend safer recruitment training. Visitors and contractors to the offices and children’s homes are properly vetted and not left unsupervised with children until vetting satisfactory.

4. Support

Support is provided for children and young people, carers and staff creating an environment of openness and transparency. Regional Foster Families are committed to establishing meaningful relationships with children and young people and facilitating support for them and their carers in a number of different formats. Children who have experienced harm will be encouraged and helped to engage with any therapeutic interventions or other services that can be identified to enable them to manage their feelings and process their experiences.

5. Supervision

There is effective, regular and rigorous supervision in place, both formally and informally, for all staff and carers. Staff and carers are required to consider safeguarding and child protection issues as part of the supervision process and openly discuss and reflect on their safeguarding practices. The agency is committed to learning from reflective sessions and always considers how things can be improved for the children in our care.

6. Education and Training

Regional Foster Families provides regular, good quality training to staff and carers to ensure they are alert to, and confident in, their response to child protection and safeguarding issues.

Local Authority Duties and Responsibilities

Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act (1989) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their care. They also have a duty to investigate and take necessary action to protect children who have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm.

The Children Act (1989) defines harm as “ill treatment or the impairment of health or development”. Development means “physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development”

Working Together 2013 defines abuse as “a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.”

In addition to the above Working Together 2018 advises:

“Children may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take.”

Working Together 2018 replaces Local Children Safeguarding Boards (LCSBs) with Local Safeguarding Partners; the aim of which is to create flexible new local safeguarding arrangements led by three safeguarding partners (local authorities, chief officers of police, and clinical commissioning groups). It places a duty on those three partners to make arrangements to work together, and with any relevant agencies, for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their area. All three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements.

A safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as:

(a) the local authority

(b) a clinical commissioning group for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area (

c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area

(Working Together 2018)

The local arrangements should link to other strategic partnership work happening locally to support children and families. This will include other public boards including Health and Wellbeing Boards, Adult Safeguarding Boards, Channel Panels, Improvement Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, the Local Family Justice Board and MAPPAs.

The local safeguarding partners must ensure there is independent scrutiny of the effectiveness of the local arrangements. The safeguarding arrangements should be published by the safeguarding partners, and the guidance sets out what should be covered in the publication.

Partners must report at least annually on what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice. The guidance sets out what should be included in this report.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Guidance – Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together.

Child Protection Procedures

Each Safeguarding Partnership produces policy and guidance which all agencies operating within its area must follow.

Regional Foster Families ensures that copies of each local authority's procedures are available to staff, carers and young people as appropriate. Regional Foster Families consults with Safeguarding Partners and seeks its views and approval of these procedures. Standard 22.4 states that child protection procedures are submitted for consideration and comment to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Regional Foster Families will advise the Local Safeguarding Partners of updated Child Protection and Safeguarding policies following an annual internal Senior Management Review. Regional Foster Families Senior Designated Manager (SDM) i.e. the Regional Manager, is responsible for all safeguarding and child protection concerns and arising issues. They are responsible for liaison with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and notifying OFSTED of any significant events. In their absence responsibility is assumed by the deputy or any other available Senior Designated Manager (Regional Manager) across the

agency. Regional Foster Families provides carers with a contact list of who is involved in safeguarding situations including the person's name, role and number.

Allegations of Abuse or Neglect

If there is an allegation of abuse or neglect, or if it is suspected, Regional Foster Families staff and foster carers should follow the child protection procedures of the local authority in which the child lives. Staff must report a child protection / safeguarding concern to the Senior Designated Manager, their deputy or another Senior Designated Manager within the agency. The Local Authority Social Worker for the child (or their manager) should be informed as soon as possible by telephone and in writing i.e. email. The LADO for the geographical area of the foster carer should be informed within 24 hours in the event of an allegation. OFSTED will be notified of any significant events.

Child Protection Enquiries

Any enquiry will usually be undertaken by the local authority where the child lives although they will need to work in conjunction with the local authority which has the responsibility for the child.

Duties Placed on Fostering Agencies

The Fostering Regulations (2011) require that "the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times".

Before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's

- wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and
- religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

Where local authorities decide to look after children by placing them in foster homes, the foster carer and those supervising them are responsible for providing them with care on behalf of the local authority.

This document details policy and guidance for Regional Foster Families foster carers and staff and it is the responsibility of all those concerned to ensure that they have read and understand its contents.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is not restricted to parents. The following definitions are taken from Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013).

"Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may

be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.”

Child Abuse Can Be:

Physical: a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional: is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or ‘making fun’ of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual: sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Neglect: is the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and / or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment);
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger;

- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs”

Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Child Criminal Exploitation

As set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

County Lines, as set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, is the term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

Child abuse has no boundaries. It can happen anywhere and is not determined by class, race, culture, health or intelligence. It can have severe and often long-term effects. In its most extreme forms, child abuse kills.

Institutional Abuse

Institutional abuse is the mistreatment of people brought about by poor or inadequate care or support, or systematic poor practice that affects the whole care setting. It occurs when the individual's wishes and needs are sacrificed for the smooth running of a group, service or organisation.

Why does it happen?

In formal settings institutional abuse is more likely to occur where staff are:

inadequately trained

poorly supervised

not supported by management

have poor communication skills

part of a 'closed' culture, for example a care setting where new ideas, visitors, care management or other professional involvement is discouraged

Institutional abuse can involve more than one abuser, and there might also be a number of people experiencing the same abuse e.g. hate crime against particular groups or several family members mistreating a dependent other.

What to do if there are concerns for the welfare of a child

Any information about a child or their circumstances which may have a bearing on possible abuse or neglect, past, present or future must be made available to the responsible local authority. It is your duty to share the information. Remember, if you do nothing:

- The child could be put at further risk
- Other children could be put at risk
- An investigation could be compromised and vital evidence lost
- You will be in breach of your foster carer agreement / employment contract and therefore your continued foster carer approval / employment would be put into question.

If you notice or become aware of anything that might suggest concern for the welfare of a child both staff and foster carers must report that concern to the Senior Designated Manager (Regional Manager) for child protection at the fostering agency. If the designated person is not available the deputy contact will be the manager from the nearest Regional Foster Families' Office. If it is outside of normal office hours please contact the emergency on call person for Regional Foster Families.

Please make sure that you write clear notes of what happened at the time, what has been said and who is involved. Such records are important and are likely to be needed later on.

It is important at this stage to only inform a member of staff from Regional Foster Families or the local authority. Others, such as birth family, may need to be informed at a later stage but informing others could jeopardise the inquiry and result in interference with witnesses or victims.

If for some reason the Regional Manager or deputy are not available, speak to the regional office and explain to a member of staff that you need to speak to someone urgently with regard to a safeguarding matter. If you are phoning outside

normal office hours your call will be directed to a duty worker who will liaise with an appropriate manager within the organisation.

If for any reason you are unable to get hold of a member of staff from Regional Foster Families you must contact the safeguarding children / child protection or emergency duty team for the authority where the child is resident. If you unable to contact any of the above then you must contact the Police.

People in positions of trust

“Organisations and agencies working with children and families should have clear policies for dealing with allegations against people who work with children. Such policies should make a clear distinction between an allegation, a concern about the quality of care or practice or a complaint.”

(Working Together 2018 - see Complaints, Allegations Or Serious Concerns About Standards Of Care In Relation To Foster Carers Or Members Of Their Household Policy)

Where concerns are about someone who works with children that indicates an individual has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence towards a child
- Behaved towards a child in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children

Such concerns should be raised as quickly as possible with the Senior Designated Manager

There are specific actions to be taken by the Senior Designated Manager who must:

- seek confirmation of the allegation and its nature
- Contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within one working day and agree actions.
- Report to OFSTED

Regional Foster Families will inform and work with Police if they believe any criminal act against children has been committed by either staff, carers or others who work with children in any capacity.

If a child makes a disclosure or says something concerning the following steps should be taken:

- Listen to what the child has to say. You may need to ask for clarification, but do not prompt the child or make suggestions and do not push for details as this may jeopardise any subsequent inquiry. Reassure the child that you have listened to them and have understood what they have said.
- Explain to the child that you need to let Regional Foster Families know what has happened and that they will talk to their social worker about it. Do not make any promises to a child as you may not be able to keep them!
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you and tell them what you are going to do next.
- Write down in as much detail as possible what was said, what you observed, who was involved and when and who you have contacted. Only write down facts not opinions and ensure you include the date and time.
- Even if you are not sure whether the information is relevant or how quickly it should be passed on, talk to someone as soon as possible.
- Record (in writing) all telephone conversations at the time that they took place. Records will need to be available to the child's social worker or those undertaking the child protection enquiry.
- Ensure all information relating to the child including reports and records regarding a disclosure of abuse are stored in a secure place, preferably a locked cabinet.

If you become aware of information that might suggest the possibility of physical evidence of abuse, e.g. following an allegation of sexual assault; you should consider how this evidence can be protected. This may mean safeguarding articles of clothing or other items to be made available to the police. It may be necessary for a child or young person to undertake a medical examination. For example, delaying bathing and / or not washing their clothes may help to preserve physical evidence.

You will need to balance the gathering of evidence with the emotional needs of the child. Do not take photographs of a child even if this is to record injuries. Police or health professionals will undertake this if and when it is deemed appropriate. It is however appropriate to draw a picture of any marks or write a description whilst it is fresh in your memory. Please request a 'body map' from staff at Regional Foster Families to assist.

The Investigation Process

In planning any investigation, if there are two local authorities involved, they will need to work together to ensure that any action necessary is focused on the needs of the child. In many cases only one local authority will be involved in the process.

After a concern has been raised, staff from Regional Foster Families will immediately:

- Notify the local authority where the child is resident by contacting the appropriate children's services dedicated referral team (for example Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub: "MASH" in Devon).
- Notify the local authority that holds responsibility for the child. This will normally be the case responsible social worker or team manager. These are the social workers who will have the ongoing responsibility for the care planning of the child.
- Depending on the nature of the concerns the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will also be contacted; should concerns be about the Senior Designated Manager, Director, ADM or other such individual then the role of communicating with the LADO may be managed by a manager from a different region.

The initial contact will usually be by telephone.

Strategy Discussions / Planning the Investigation

The responsible staff within children's services will discuss any concerns that might suggest abuse with the police and agree the process for investigation; they will also take into account any immediate action that may be necessary to protect the child, or children, for whom there is concern. The investigation process will be agreed through a Child Protection Strategy Discussion. The strategy discussion must always involve children's services and the police but may also include other relevant agencies e.g. education and health and the LADO. Depending on the circumstances, there may be further strategy discussions to monitor the progress of the investigation. A decision may be made at a strategy discussion to discontinue further investigation under child protection procedures, having concluded that the criteria are no longer met.

Within the investigation process the primary focus for children's services will be on the safety and welfare of the child whilst the police will focus on the investigation of a possible criminal act.

If you have raised concerns about the care of a child or young person you will receive a response in writing within ten days stating what steps will be taken or have been taken to resolve the concern.

Children or young people who have raised a concern directly will receive a written response within ten days explaining how their concern is being dealt with.

Child Protection Conferences

During the process of, or at the conclusion of a child protection investigation, a decision may be made that it is necessary to convene a child protection conference.

“Where the agencies most involved judge that a child may continue to, or be likely to, suffer significant harm local authority children’s social care should convene a child protection conference” [Working Together 2013].

In most circumstances a child protection conference will not be necessary for looked after children as the safeguarding matters should in most cases be dealt with through the looked after child review process. Understandably, a child placed within a foster placement should not be expected to be at risk of significant harm and needing a child protection plan.

The purpose of a child protection conference

You may be asked to attend a child protection conference whatever your role within Regional Foster Families in order to assist in the process of gaining full and accurate information and to help implement any plan that may be made to keep a child safe.

The child protection conference can make a decision that a children’s protection plan is necessary for the child’s ongoing protection on the basis that it believes that the child is at risk of significant harm. The conference will also decide which category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered or is likely to suffer.

Agency role at the child protection conference

There may be a number of people attending the conference. Any information i.e. reports should be shared with the parents / carers and as appropriate, children, prior to the conference taking place.

Foster carers, supervising social workers, support workers or others may have information which could be valuable to the conference and to the decision making process.

The agency may be required to provide a written report.

Foster carers whilst being expected to provide information to a child protection conference will not be asked to express an opinion regarding the need for a child protection plan or categories of abuse.

All attendees need to:

- Listen carefully to what is being said

- Ask for clarification on areas which have not been understood and be prepared to contribute, making clear what is fact and what is opinion.

The conference will be chaired by an independent person who will ensure that everyone present is given the opportunity to contribute. The conference may wish to hear from a foster carer about how the child has settled into the placement and the details of the child's behaviour. It is important that any reports provide a balanced and accurate picture.

Proper consideration needs to be given to the way in which both staff and foster carers are supported during this process. It may be necessary for the supervising social worker to liaise with the social worker and conference chair in advance, particularly when difficulties are anticipated.

Any allocated tasks following the conference in support of a child protection plan must be undertaken as agreed and not changed in practice without consultation with the key worker.

Possible outcomes of the child protection conference

- A child protection conference may decide that a child protection plan is not necessary. It may in some circumstances still make recommendations regarding ongoing care planning for a child. In this case, a process will be agreed as to how that plan will be monitored.
- A child protection conference may decide that a child protection plan is necessary in which case it will make recommendations as to the necessary actions within the child protection plan. A key worker (see below) will be appointed who will be responsible for oversight of the child protection plan; a core group will be agreed consisting of primary workers involved in the case who will meet on a regular basis to monitor the effectiveness of the child protection plan. A date for a review child protection conference will be set.

Review child protection conference

A review conference is normally held within three months of the initial conference. Its purpose is to review progress of the child protection plan and to decide whether a child protection plan continues to be necessary. If this is the case, a date will be set for a further review conference and adjustments will be made as necessary to the child protection plan.

Confidentiality

In order to protect the interests of the child, it is crucial that information obtained in the course of the investigation and subsequent process is treated with the strictest confidentiality and used for no other purpose than the child's protection. All information relating to children in care should be kept in secure place, preferably a locked cabinet.

Key Worker

A key worker is appointed at an initial child protection conference. The role of the key worker is to exercise certain overall responsibilities in respect of the child protection plan, such as providing a focal point for information, coordinating multi-agency assessment and monitoring the welfare / progress of the child. This is usually the local authority social worker.

Children with Disabilities

“The available UK evidence on the extent of abuse among disabled children suggests that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse and that the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase the risk of both abuse and neglect” [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010].

The following section “What to do if there are concerns for the welfare of a child” is to be followed for all children; this includes children with disabilities.

Whilst safeguards for children with disabilities are essentially the same as for non-disabled children, we recognise that there are additional risk factors which increase the likelihood that these most vulnerable of children are more likely to suffer from abuse of various kinds and can make the investigation more challenging. During any investigation regarding a child with disabilities the following additional risk factors should be taken into account:

- Many disabled children are at an increased likelihood of being socially isolated with fewer outside contacts than non-disabled children
- Their dependency on parents and carers for practical assistance in daily living, which may include intimate personal care, increases their risk of exposure to abusive behaviour
- They may have an impaired capacity to resist or avoid abuse
- They may have speech, language and communication needs which may make it difficult to tell others what is happening
- They often do not have access to someone they can trust to disclose that they have been abused
- They are especially vulnerable to bullying and intimidation.

See Safeguarding and Children with Disabilities Policy Statement.

Children and Young People that Self-Harm

Self-Harm is deliberate harm of one’s own body. Behaviours that constitute self-harm include:

- Cutting

- Biting
- ingesting poisons and / or sharp objects
- breaking of bones
- bruising self with objects
- head banging
- punching self
- hair pulling

Other indirect and not unequivocal behaviours include

- eating disorders
- drug taking
- binge drinking
- extreme tattooing and / or body piercings.

Matching

Regional Foster Families will consider the risks associated with self-harm when placing a young person. It may need to be considered how much time a carer has to dedicate to a young person who is highly distressed and engaging in self-harm, particularly when we are aware that it, may take many months for change to occur. It should also be considered that self-harm can be very distressing for others. Carers may not feel able to cope with managing such behaviours and the emotional impact on others within the household including other looked after children and birth children should also be taken into account.

Regional Foster Families aims to help foster carers understand the purpose of self-harm for children and young people, help them support those children and young people and ultimately help them find alternative ways of managing their feelings. This may be achieved by further training and education or 1:1 direct work.

The Truth Hurts Inquiry (2006) reports that 1 in 15 young people in the UK between 11 and 25 have self-harmed. The figure will be higher for those in care.

Reasons for self-harm:

Many people who self-harm describe it as a way of releasing their emotions and helping them cope.

“A purposeful, if morbid act of self-help” (Favazza 1989)

Young people have stated that it

- helps regulate anxiety and distress
- increases relaxation and assists with sleeping
- acts as a way of communicating to others
- makes them feel cleansed

It should not be seen as:

- A sign of madness. It is a sign of distress not madness and a way of someone coping with great pain in their life.
- Suicide. Self-harm is about coping with life not trying to end it. Those that self-harm are very clear that it has a completely different meaning and purpose to suicide.
- A sign that someone is a risk to others. People that self-harm direct pain and anger at themselves. The act may be shocking and violent but does not indicate that they are a risk to others.
- Attention seeking. Many believe that self-harm should be ignored. Many people that self-harm go to great lengths to hide it, others use it to draw attention to the pain and distress they are experiencing. Some have no other way of telling you they are in pain; in which case it is entirely appropriate to give them the attention they require.
- Trivial. How bad a wound is does not indicate the level of pain a person is feeling. The fact that someone has gone to the lengths of self-harm indicates the fact that they are highly distressed.

Helpful responses to self-harm:

- Always stay calm and constructive.
- Never show horror or disgust to the person about their injuries.
- Take a non-judgmental attitude towards the person and try to see it as their way of managing their distress
- Work from the assumption that they have a limited number of coping mechanisms so have learnt to rely on self-harm as a way of dealing with their pain
- Acknowledge the person's feelings, show them that you care about them
- Respond to the injuries with compassion and concern giving them a message that they matter and deserve care.
- Help them develop new coping mechanisms
- Create space for them to talk about their self-harm and give them the message it can be understood
- Encourage them to seek expert advice and support.
- Do not attempt to stop someone self-harming until they have developed other coping mechanisms. Although everyone desires to see a young person stop self-harming it could create more risk to make them stop if they have no other way of coping. Please talk to your supervising social worker and any health professionals about harm minimisation strategies.

Regional Foster Families will work closely with social services to manage the risk around self-harm and help the young person reduce the behaviour both in severity and regularity. We will work with carers on creating contracts with young people that help them take responsibility for their actions (in a caring way) and also develop ways of caring for themselves if they have self-harmed (e.g. cleaning and dressing their own wounds). We will also support carers to attend training on self-harm.

A risk assessment should be completed on all young people who self-harm regularly. The Designated Manager should be informed of all incidents of self-harm that occur or the on call person from Regional Foster Families out of office hours.

Serious incidents (where risk, severity or regularity is seen to have increased or the young person has attended hospital) will be shared with the child local authority, and where appropriate, LADO and OFSTED.

Please ask your Regional Manager for further advice and support about working with a young person that self-harms. Self-harm is an extremely distressing and anxiety provoking thing for everyone involved so it is imperative that you seek the advice and support of others.

Suicide

Adolescence can be a very difficult time, particularly for young people in care. Young people who lack support and the practical experience to solve problems can sometimes feel no-one will be able help them and that killing themselves is the best way out. The risk is increased where the young person:

- Is depressed, or when they have a serious mental illness
- Is using drugs or alcohol when they are upset
- Has tried to kill themselves a number of times before
- Has planned for a while about how to die without being saved
- Has a relative or friend who tried to kill themselves

When it is known that a child or young person has suicidal tendencies the matching process will be very important and ideally a risk assessment and multi-agency planning meeting should be convened prior to a child coming into placement.

A full and comprehensive risk assessment must be carried out on all children who have suicidal ideation or have attempted suicide in the past. This should be agreed with the local authority and shared with the foster carers. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly outlined within the risk assessment and support for the carers should be clear along with telephone numbers for who to ring out of hours.

If anyone is concerned about a child or young person's emotional state of mind and believes that they may no longer be coping and could be at risk of suicide, they should inform the Senior Designated Manager or their supervising social worker as soon as possible. Where this concern arises out of hours then the Regional Foster Families on call person must be contacted or, if for any reason you are unable to contact them please, ring the local authority emergency duty team. If for any reason you are unable to get hold of any of the people above then contact your GP or nearest accident and emergency department for advice.

If a young person has attempted suicide then dial 999 immediately or take them to the nearest A&E department.

Parent and Child Families

In a situation where a child is looked after and the parent is eighteen or older, provisions relating to looked after children will apply in relation to the child only.

In every case where a parent under eighteen has been placed with their child with Regional Foster Families' carers, both parent and child will be looked after and as such both have safeguarding needs which will require individual attention.

Parent and child Families are made so that local authorities can empower parents to remain with, and care for, their children. Therefore, the plans for both are inextricably linked. In many cases the need for a parent and child placement will have been identified due to concerns regarding the parent's ability to meet the child's needs and the placement is often an opportunity to keep a baby safe whilst assessing the parent's ability to care. The quality of placement supervision is crucial to ensure that a proper focus is maintained on the needs of the child avoiding an over-emphasis on the needs of the parent.

As stated above, where both parent and child are looked after, the safeguarding procedures should be applied accordingly to each.

The matching and planning process is central to ensuring the ongoing safety of any child and the following factors should be considered in addition to the wider safeguarding procedures:

- There must be clarity in respect of the parent's responsibilities regarding the care of the child. It must be recognised that a child will have care needs over a twenty four hour period, such as feeding, changing, being comforted during illness etc. and the circumstances in which the foster carers will need to provide close supervision and / or assume the care of the child.
- There should be clear advice to the carers and the parents regarding recording information on the care of the child and the sort of information that would be of concern and that should be reported to the social worker.
- The foster carers must have full information regarding the expectations of the placement and the needs of the parent and the child; have received appropriate training and have the experience to meet those needs.
- Foster carers will need advice regarding out of hours support.
- The placement plan will need to clearly identify the monitoring and review process and the expectations and goals of the placement.

- Regional Foster Families and the responsible children's services authority will need to be satisfied that the proposed arrangements for a parent and child will not unduly affect the foster carer's ability to care for any other children in the placement and / or the foster carer's own children.
- The foster carer will need clarity regarding the legal status of the parent and child.
- There must be consideration as to the additional support necessary according to the age of a baby / child prior to the placement commencing e.g. health visiting support.
- The foster carer will require information about parents pertaining to risk that they or their child/ren may present to other members of the household. To enable this process a PNC will be sought as soon as possible, preferably prior to any adults coming into the household. Regional Foster Families may also request a DBS check on adults coming into the household and / or undertake a risk assessment. A DBS check may be requested prior to or once the placement has started. Any potential risks and the management of this should be discussed openly at the placement planning meeting.
- As part of safeguarding children already in foster care, Regional Foster Families will always inform and seek consent from that child's local authority for a parent and child placement to be placed alongside them.

Parent and child Families where the child is subject to a child protection plan

In certain circumstances where parent and child Families are being made, the child may already be subject to a child protection plan, for example, where a child is being placed alongside their parent in a foster placement following birth. Foster carers should be fully involved in the child protection process including attending child protection conferences even prior to a planned placement (see Foster Carers' role at the Child Protection Conference). It should also be expected that foster carers will be invited to attend and contribute to Core Group Meetings. Where another child is in placement, a risk assessment will be undertaken to consider viability; this will most often occur at the matching stage of the placement.

Should concerns arise the child protection and safeguarding policy should be followed

Trafficked Children/Sexually Exploited Children

Trafficked children and those subject to sexual exploitation can be hard to identify as at risk of harm. They may not regard themselves as victims and may not be willing to give evidence against those who are harming them. We have to take responsibility for identifying victims of sexual exploitation and putting in place

strategies for protecting them and preventing further harm, sometimes this appears to be against the child's wishes.

If a foster carer or member of staff has reason to believe that a child may be a victim of trafficking and / or sexual exploitation they must immediately inform a member of Regional Foster Families and follow the safeguarding policies and procedures.

All staff and carers should make themselves familiar with "Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked" (Department of Education, 2011) and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (Department of Education, 2011). Please also refer to Regional Foster Families "Guidance and Information on Working with Children who have been Trafficked and / or Sexually Exploited". All these documents should be read in conjunction with Working Together, 2018.

Should concerns arise the child protection and safeguarding policy should be followed

Contextual Safeguarding– County Lines

This is a new concept which offers an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families; for example exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime networks such as county lines exploiting children to sell drugs; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

"As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Extremist groups make use of the internet to radicalise and recruit and to promote extremist materials. Any potential harmful effects to individuals identified as vulnerable to extremist ideologies or being drawn into terrorism should also be considered¹⁹.

Assessments of children in such cases should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children who may be alleged perpetrators should also be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare. Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care. Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They should look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and

support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child. “
(Working Together 2018)

Missing from Care and Risk of Sexual Exploitation/ Criminal Exploitation

All children absent from placement are at increased risk of harm and Regional Foster Families takes each and every incident seriously and has rigorous procedures in place to try and ascertain the whereabouts of the child or young person and see them returned safely. **See Regional Foster Families ‘Absent Without Authority Policy’.**

There are multiple types of children who go missing from care and for multiple reasons. These factors, such as a child’s age or history of mental health issues will impact on the level of risk posed to them whilst they are absent. It is imperative that where carers or staff have information about the reasons a child may have not returned or factors that increase their vulnerability that they share this information with Regional Foster Families staff and / or the police. Where we know a child is at risk of going missing actions to reduce this risk should be discussed and agreed as part of the placement plan.

As with children who have been trafficked, there is a clear link between children going missing and sexual or criminal exploitation. A child who is frequently missing from care may be exhibiting signs that they are being sexually or criminally exploited. If there is reason to believe, or if a child has been identified as having been a victim of sexual or criminal exploitation, carers should regard any unexplained absence from the foster placement as a high- risk situation. In cases where the child has been trafficked or there is suspicion of sexual or criminal exploitation, this will always mean notifying the police and the child’s social worker that they are missing from the foster home and ensuring all agencies, including the police are aware of their increased vulnerability.

Following a period of absence, Regional Foster Families will try to ascertain, in partnership with the local authority and other professionals, the reason the child was absent and ensure that return to placement interviews are conducted in line with local and national protocols so that an analysis of push / pull factors and effective actions result to reduce risk. Where possible this will be done through talking to the child. This may lead to a multi-agency strategy meeting where the professional network, including carers, can discuss and share information about the child in an attempt to reduce the risk of harm to them. Frequent absconders should have a risk assessment in place to identify specific actions that can be taken to try and reduce the frequency and length of periods of absence as well as the risk of harm posed to them whilst absent.

Should concerns arise the child protection and safeguarding policy should be followed

Bullying

Bullying is a serious issue and one that Regional Foster Families is committed to dealing with effectively. Young Minds (2014) report that 70% of children and young people experience bullying.

There are several behaviours that constitute bullying:

- Name calling
- Telling lies about someone
- Teasing
- Hitting or causing physical pain through some other means
- Taking possessions
- Excluding someone
- Threats / intimidation
- Texting unkind / abusive messages
- Sharing personal information / photos on social media
- Using Facebook or other social media to be unkind about someone.

Children and young people may experience bullying because of their size, gender, disability, sexual orientation or race or anything else that may make them 'different' to their peers. Bullying can result in feelings of low self-worth and depression, self-harm and in extreme cases suicide. Regional Foster Families aims to take seriously any allegation of bullying raised by a child or young person and to work with other agencies such as schools and local authorities to help a child or young person through it. See Regional Foster Families 'Countering Bullying Policy'.

Should concerns arise the child protection and safeguarding policy should be followed

On-line Safety and Internet Safety

The development of the internet and social networking sites has presented new opportunities for those wishing to abuse and exploit children and young people. Looked after children can be particularly vulnerable to this form of abuse. The internet can also offer the opportunity for the families of looked after children, and from whom they have been removed, to continue abusive behaviour and in some cases to undermine Families. All Regional Foster Families carers are provided with "Advice on child internet safety 1.0" written by the UK Council for Internet Safety and this issue is also discussed within Safeguarding training.

Should concerns arise the child protection and safeguarding policy should be followed

Risk Assessments

Regional Foster Families will request full information from Local Authorities relating to anything that may indicate a child or young person is at risk from others, presents a risk to themselves or may pose a risk to others. Initial pre placement

risk assessment takes place to ensure that each match between child and foster carer has considered and assessed specific risks presented by young people and what strategies need to be taken to help manage risk factors effectively. This enables staff and carers to provide a safe environment for the children in its care. Regional Foster Families recognises that appropriate risks should be encouraged and are part of growing up and that children should always be taught ways of keeping themselves safe both at home and in the community. Regional Foster Families will share risk assessments with the placing authority as well as carers and staff. Risk assessments will be reviewed regularly and are recognised as a fluid rather than static document where risk can increase or decrease over time.

Complaints Procedures

Children and young people are provided with clear, effective and user friendly information regarding how and to whom to make a complaint. Regional Foster Families provides each person with a 'children and young person's guide' to achieve this alongside building relationships and providing carers with information too. Regional Foster Families also works pro-actively to ensure that all children and young people have access to an independent visitor to advocate, child line and any other form of external mentor. Regional Foster Families has clear procedures for dealing with both 'formal' and informal' complaints and takes complaints and concerns seriously. Regional Foster Families are also committed to getting feedback from children and young people through participation and making changes based on that information.

Inter-Agency Principles

Regional Foster Families seeks to honour the following principles:

The Child

- The interests of the child are paramount.
- The child must be helped to live with his / her own family wherever possible and stay in contact with those who are important to him / her.
- The child must be consulted and his / her wishes and feelings taken into consideration in all decisions made about him / her.
- As a young person grows up, their age and understanding will equip them to take an increasing part in making decisions which concern their own life.
- Any plan for a child must be based on an assessment of the child's individual needs and take into account his / her religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic needs and any difficulties or disabilities specific to that child.
- The child may take action to initiate, prevent or complain about certain matters.

The Parents

- Parents are usually the best people to care for a child and should be expected and helped to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Parents should remain as closely involved as is consistent with the child's interests if the child is unable to remain at home.
- Wider families matter as well as parents.

Equal Opportunities

Each child and family are unique with differing experiences, circumstances and perspectives. Regional Foster Families are determined that every effort be made to identify and ameliorate any disadvantages or discrimination experienced by any child or adult arising from ethnic origin, culture, religion, language, disability, gender, sexual orientation, class or unemployment. We are committed to ensuring that every person who is in receipt of child protection and child care services is treated with dignity and respect, and that their full participation is facilitated.

Quality of Work in Child Protection/Safeguarding Training

Regional Foster Families aim to ensure that the children known to us receive a high quality of work to protect them from harm and to ameliorate the effects of abuse when it has happened.

Regional Foster Families fulfils this task by:

- Ensuring that all staff and carers receive safeguarding training appropriate to their role and responsibility which includes refresher training. Training is provided by bodies approved by the Local Safeguarding Partners: all staff must refresh their multi agency safeguarding training on a two-year basis and engage in externally provided training courses to ensure safeguarding knowledge is updated and relevant to their role. Staff are also required to attend agency safeguarding training days. Foster carers are required to attend Local Safeguarding Partners multi agency training at intervals laid out by the local authorities usually two years but no longer than 3 years. Foster carers are also required to attend agency safeguarding training days (every three years), and to attend other core training courses on de-escalation and managing behaviour and safer care. Individual appraisal and personal and professional development plans are in place for each member of staff and each foster carer.
- Regional Foster Families recognise that carers and staff may require specialist training to deal with certain situations such as working with a child who self-harms or working with a child who has experienced sexual exploitation. In these circumstances, Regional Foster Families are committed to ensuring appropriate training is provided through external

training, attendance at conferences or seminars or enrolment on other educational courses.

- All staff receive safeguarding / child protection induction when joining the agency and a signed record of completion is kept on staff files. The content of the induction is comprehensive and includes; safeguarding practices, management structure, key legislation and guidance, safer care, expectations and use of out of hours service, record keeping, support and supervision, training plan etc.
- Staff are subject to probationary reviews after 6 months of employment. During this time their competency in all areas of their role will be assessed including their knowledge and understanding of child protection and safeguarding issues. Where this process or any subsequent review highlights a lack of confidence or competence refresher training and increased supervision in this area will be put in place and further reviews arranged.
- Carers are subject to annual reviews where their competence, knowledge and practice will be discussed. This will be a reflective discussion and any lessons learned will be talked about openly. Carers' training and development needs will be part of this process. Carers will receive up to two unannounced visits per every 12-month period. Where concerns arise from these visits they must be discussed with the Senior Designated Manager.
- Producing clear inter-agency child protection procedures for all those working with children.
- Making those procedures available to all staff and carers working with children.
- Undertaking regular training and development.
- Monitoring the management of child protection work through regular liaison and communication with the local authority.
- A system of regular, reflective and rigorous formal supervision.
- Having in place effective systems to ensure positive matching between carers and children.

Safeguarding and Child Protection Supervision

“Professionals and organisations protecting children need to reflect on the quality of their service and learn from their own practices and that of others” (Working Together, 2013).

A key element to achieving this is the provision of high quality supervision both of staff and foster carers where the focus is firmly on child protection.

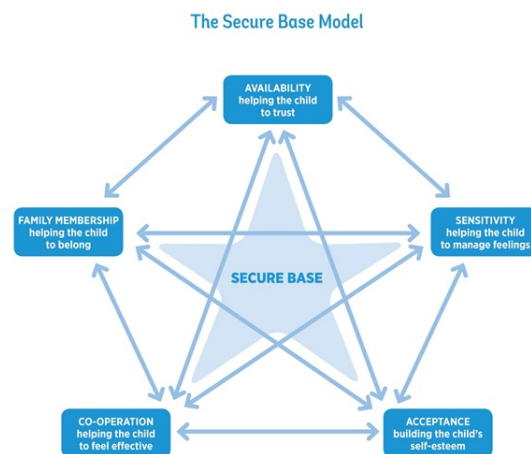
Each staff member (including the manager) has formal supervision on a monthly basis and more regularly when needed. Staff providing supervision to both other staff and to foster carers have received appropriate certificated training in reflective child centred supervision. Child protection and safe caring issues are always an agenda item for supervision.

“Employers are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent to carry out their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and creating an environment where staff feel able to raise concerns and feel supported in their safeguarding role “ (Working Together 2018)

Secure Base Model

The Secure Base Model is:

“A framework for caregivers and those who support them to think in more detail about the different but connected changing approaches that can help a child to move forward towards greater security” (University of East Anglia, 2014).



Regional Foster Families believe that this model can assist in all child protection / safeguarding measures through the five dimensions core to the model: Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Co-operation and Family Membership.

All the dimensions work together to enable a child to trust, manage their feelings and behaviour, build their self-esteem and feel effective and like they belong. These dimensions could help enable a child to make a disclosure and will assist us in providing the correct, child centred care through an investigation. As an approach to fostering it may also prevent abuse from occurring, acting as a preventative measure.

Due to Regional Foster Families belief that this is an effective and caring approach it is our policy to train carers and staff in the model and ensure its effective use in both staff and carers supervision.

Essential Reading:

- Regional Foster Families: Absent without Authority Policy
- Regional Foster Families: Whistleblowing Policy
- Regional Foster Families: Countering Bullying Policy
- Regional Foster Families: Behaviour Management and Physical Intervention Policy and Procedures
- Regional Foster Families: Procedure for Managing Allegations of Child Abuse made against Regional Foster Families' Staff
- Regional Foster Families: Procedure for Managing Allegations of Abuse made against Foster Carers.
- Regional Foster Families: Data Protection Policy
- Regional Foster Families: Safeguarding and Children with Disabilities Policy Statement.
- Regional Foster Families: Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Regional Foster Families: Guidance and Information on Working with Children who have been Trafficked and/or Sexually Exploited)
- Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked (Department of Education, 2011)
- Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners (Department of Education, 2017)
- Advice To Parents And Carers On Gangs -Home Office 2014
- Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery – Home Office November 2017
- Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance (Home Office Guidance September 2018)

Regional Foster Families' Process for Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

Flow Chart Referral: What to do if you are concerned about a child's safety

