Fosterline Wales Factsheet
Allegations

Introduction
Facing an allegation of abuse or neglect is something that some foster carers will, unfortunately, experience during their fostering career. Our State of the Nation 2016 report showed that a third of the carers surveyed were the subject of an allegation. This is inevitably a distressing time for everyone involved. This factsheet explains what an allegation is, what happens if you are subject to an allegation, and how to protect everyone in our household.

What is an allegation?
An allegation is an assertion from any person that a foster carer, or other member of the fostering household, has or may have behaved in a way that has harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child, or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they are unsuitable for work with children.

Allegations are more serious than general standards of care complaints against foster carers, because allegations have to be investigated under the local child protection procedure. Allegations should be treated differently from concerns about poor standards of care.

An allegation made against you or a member of your family is a safeguarding matter, referred to your local social services department and investigated under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures. Allegations will be investigated differently from concerns about poor standards of care.

An allegation made against you or a member of your family is a safeguarding matter, referred to your local social services department and investigated by the Safeguarding Team under the current All Wales Child Protection Procedures. childreninwales.org.uk/our-work/safeguarding/wales-child-protection-procedures-review-group/ See section 4.3.2, investigating allegations against foster carers

Fosterline Wales is available daily 930-1230 on 0800 316 7664 (or fosterlinewales@fostering.net) to provide immediate telephone information, advice and support.

The investigation will:

- Ensure the immediate safety of all children in the household, both foster and birth children. This could mean removing the children you look after, pending the results of the investigation.
- Inform the police.

- Convene a strategy meeting. A strategy meeting is a multi-disciplinary meeting chaired by a senior manager in social services and follows on from the initial strategy discussion. The police will be present as they are part of the investigation and may conduct their own separate investigation. A representative of your fostering service will also be there, plus any professional who has relevant information about the incident, the child, or your family.

The meeting considers the information available, plans the investigation, who will support the foster carer, and what information can be shared with the foster. The chair of the strategy meeting will confirm this in writing to the foster carers. Following the final strategy meeting the Safeguarding Manager and your fostering service will inform you of the outcome.
Ensure that this information is confirmed in writing and retained for safekeeping.

You could be interviewed as part of the safeguarding investigation. You may also be asked by the police to provide an interview under caution. It is strongly advised that you seek legal advice and have a solicitor present at a police interview. Members of The Fostering Network should phone the 24/7 legal helpline 01384 88 57 34 for advice and solicitor attendance at the interview.

Until the interview by the police, your fostering service cannot share information about the allegation. The person supporting the foster carer should arrange for the carer to verify and comment on the factual information given, unless this compromises any police investigation, inform them of the safeguarding procedures that are being followed and of the timescales. Foster carers often say they receive no support just at the time when they need it most. This is because, however unpleasant this sounds, you are part of an investigation, so for your own protection they can't divulge information before you have been interviewed. This is also why you can't attend the strategy meeting. Be patient, other support is available.

Foster carers should also be prepared for the possibility of additional investigations:

- If the foster carer has birth children under 18, these children may also be the subject of separate investigations
- If the foster carer is a grandparent or cares for other children, the foster carer may be asked to give their voluntary consent not to have unsupervised contact with these children during the investigation.

Once members of the strategy meeting obtain all the relevant information, they will meet again to decide the outcome of the safeguarding investigation. The outcome of any police investigation will be shared separately with you by the police officer. Their prime concern is always the safety of all the children in your household. The local authority and your fostering service will share this decision with you.

It is in everybody's interests to complete this process as promptly as possible, within the agreed timescale. Experience suggests it is typically weeks, rather than days, but it could be months. This is a very difficult period for carers, who tell us that they have

limited information and that their whole lives are on hold. While the allegation investigation is current, no new children will be placed with you.

You will be told the conclusion and what happens next. There are three aspects to this:

1. A decision about whether any child or young person remains in (or returns to)
   your care.
2. Any referral by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service.
3. Your fostering service will reassess your approval as a foster carer and submit a report to the Fostering Panel.

Another possible decision is that the investigation confirms a 'standards of care' concern, which then requires the fostering service to investigation as to whether the carer maintained high enough standards of care, and whether their approval to remain as a foster carer needs to be reassessed.

Support

Your fostering service has a duty to make sure you are kept fully informed, for you to know your 'rights' during the investigation and to offer independent support (National Minimum Standards 2003). This includes legal advice. The Fostering Network is one of the organisations offering independent support services and legal advice to members (see above).

Independent Support Service is for you, independent of your fostering service and in addition to anything they offer. You control the arrangements and the support is confidential.

Remember, remain an approved foster carer so your supervising social worker will continue to visit and you should continue to take part in training and other events, as usual.

Allowances

While placements will not be offered during the investigation, best practice states that you should be paid a proportion – a retainer - of the fostering allowance, even if the child has been moved from the placement. The terms are in your Foster Care Agreement and should be set out in your agency Fostering Handbook. If it is decided that the placement will not resume, your allowance will end too. Consult your independent support service or Fosterline Wales 0800 316 7664 if you are not sure about any of this.

Be prepared and stay safe

Be prepared. Follow good safer caring practice to protect your household.

- Prevention: follow the guidelines in your fostering service's policy and procedures.
- Keep your safer caring family policy up-to-date.
- Go to training.
- Keep your records up-to-date. Record incidents objectively.

- Inform your provider of any incidents as soon as you can.
- Understand how you can get support.
- Understand why children might make an allegation.

How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time, please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible. For The Fostering Network members, a 24/7 legal advice helpline is available (see above).

You can email us at:
fosterlinewales@fostering.net

Independent support

Independent support can be vital for foster carers in times of allegations or other disputes they may be involved in. The Fostering Network can provide independent support to foster carers contracted by their fostering agency. Please note that if you are a foster carer you cannot get independent support from us directly. You must contact your fostering agency to request that they contract on your behalf for an Independent Support Service.

Publications

You can purchase our publication Safer Caring: A New Approach, which covers some wider issues and suggests ways of thinking about the principles for safeguarding children and young people, at the same time as protecting yourselves and your families from allegations and complaints.

The Fostering Network has produced a booklet 'Signposts in Fostering' - Allegations, designed to help foster carers understand what is likely to happen if an allegation is made against them or a member of their family. It contains:

- an explanation of what allegations are and why they are made
- suggestion of good practice to minimise the risk of allegation
- advice about what to do if an allegation is made
- advice on how to seek legal support in the event of an allegation
- information on what might happen once an allegation has been made.

Members of The Fostering Network can purchase our Allegations publication online for just £2.00. (It is also available for £4.00 for those who are not members of The Fostering Network).

Support and resources
Our website is an essential source of information, see:
thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/allegations,
while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss allegations.
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Legal protection insurance
The Fostering Network provides our members with access to a legal protection insurance scheme. Our retired foster care membership extends this insurance to former members who are no longer fostering.

Training and consultancy
Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact out Learning and Development Manager, Sarah Mobedji at http://sarah.mobedji@fostering.net.

About The Fostering Network
The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

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