

Counteracting
bullying in
foster care

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The purpose of this document is to ensure that all children and young people placed in foster care are protected from bullying. It is the responsibility of Warrington employees that children/young people are safeguarded from bullying at all times. All children/young people will be cared for in an environment where bullying is unacceptable. Foster carers are required to be supported to promote a children or young persons social and emotional development, and to enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.

Warrington Borough Council is committed to ensuring that children/young people in care have a positive experience of care and feel safe and secure within their placements.

The term bullying refers to any behaviour which causes another person physical harm or emotional upset. Verbal or physical bullying can relate to a persons race, gender, disability or sexual orientation and can have serious consequences for the victim.

Statutory framework

Standard 3.6 states that 'Foster carers have positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.' (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011).

Standard 10.6 states that 'In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.' (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011).

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. It can take many forms but the four main types are:

- Physical (e.g. hitting, pinching, kicking, theft)
- Sexual (e.g. unwanted physical contact, abusive comments, homophobic abuse)
- Verbal (e.g. name calling, sarcasm, threats)
- Emotional (e.g. hiding books, ridicule, humiliation)
- Racist (e.g. racist remarks, taunts, graffiti, gestures)
- Indirect (e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone from special groups)
- Online or Cyber (e.g. bullying by text, social network sites)

Most bullying can include:

- Deliberate hostility and aggression to the victim
- A victim who is weaker and less powerful than the bullies
- Distress and pain for the victim

Why foster children are at particular risk

All bullies need victims. These will almost always be someone who is weaker and/or less confident than the bully.

Bullies will target victims by focusing on something about the victim that is different in order to try and justify their behaviour. This may be the victim's appearance such as weight, height or other physical features or it may be something else that makes the victim stand out from the majority of their peers – social class, religion or ethnicity. By definition, children in foster care are different – they do not live at home with their parent(s). Therefore they immediately fit the profile of potential victims for the bully. There are a number of additional common characteristics of foster children that increase their potential for being targeted:

- Many will already have been targeted and abused by others, including their primary carers
- Many will be developmentally immature
- Many will be lacking in self-confidence
- Some may have experience prior abuse or victimisation as the only time they have received attention
- Foster children are frequently isolated from their family, peers and other support systems when they become a child in care, including perhaps a change of school.
- Frequent moves may have led to a sense of insecurity and a fear or inability in developing positive relationships with peers
- A prior lack of positive attachments

Who are the bullies?

There are many reasons why children bully. Some may do it to cope with a difficult situation in their own life such as the separation of parents. Others will see it as a way of gaining kudos from their peers. Some are just used to getting their own way and may not even recognise the effect of their actions on their victims.

Some children will become bullies as a result of being victims themselves. It therefore needs to be recognised that the reasons for some foster children becoming victims are also reasons for others becoming bullies.

This will have potential implications for carer fostering more than one child and needs to be borne in mind if it is suspected that foster child is being bullied.

Children/young people might bully others for many reasons, including:

- being bullied themselves
- feeling unimportant
- wanting to be accepted by a particular group or gang
- wanting to get their own way
- not knowing it is wrong
- copying people they admire
- going through a difficult time and acting out of aggressive feelings.

Generally it can be helpful to ask questions about progress and friends at school; how break times and lunchtimes are spent; and whether your child is facing problems or difficulties at school. Don't dismiss negative signs.

If your child has been bullied

- Calmly talk to them about it
- Make a formal record of what has happened, including:
 - who was involved
 - how often the bullying has occurred
 - where it happened
 - what happened
 - reassure them that telling you was the right thing to do

Possible signs of bullying

Any of the following behaviours may indicate that a child is the victim of bullying. There may equally be other explanations that should also be considered by carers and social workers.

“A child may indicate by their behaviour that he or she is being bullied. If your child shows some of the following signs, you might want to ask if someone is bullying or threatening them.”

Children may:

- be frightened of walking to or from school
- change their usual route
- not want to go on the school bus
- beg you to drive them to school
- be unwilling to go to school (or be school phobic)
- feel ill in the mornings
- begin truanting
- begin doing poorly in their school work
- come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed
- come home starving (bully has taken dinner money)
- become withdrawn, start stammering, lack confidence
- become distressed and anxious, stop eating
- attempt or threaten suicide
- cry themselves to sleep; have nightmares
- have their possessions 'go missing'
- ask for money or start stealing money (to pay the bully)
- continually 'lose' their pocket money
- refuse to say what's wrong (too frightened of the bully)
- have unexplained bruises, scratches, cuts
- begin to bully other children or siblings
- become aggressive and unreasonable
- give improbable excuses to explain any of the above”

Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is described by Child line as being when a person or a group of people uses the internet, mobile phones, online games or any other kind of digital technology to threaten, tease, upset or humiliate someone else. This is a large problem, as it can occur over 24 hours and 7 days a week and can be by someone or a group of individuals remain anonymous.

The best way to deal with cyber bullying is to prevent it occurring. Positive and effective learning, which supports a child or young persons understanding and self esteem, can enable them to have the confidence to report.

All computers should be in family rooms and children should be asked to tell their foster carers, social worker or adult close to them if anyone bullies them online.

Key safety advice for children and young people

- Always respect others when using internet sites; be careful what you say online and what images you send
- Think before you send anything on line, as images and text can remain in the public domain quickly and forever
- Keep passwords safe
- Block all bullying and don't retaliate and or reply
- Save the evidence
- Speak to someone who you can trust immediately

Key safety advice for foster carers

- Be aware that cyber bullying exists and be alert to a child's behaviour when using ICT equipment
- Use parental controls on computers etc
- Talk with all children and young people about keeping safe and cyber bullying. Ensuring they keep themselves safe
- Remind a child not to retaliate
- Keep evidence
- Report cyber bullying immediately

Responding to suspicions or incidents of bullying

We will take all suspected or actual incidents of bullying seriously. They will be fully investigated and support will be provided to the victim as well as their carers.

Foster carers should ensure that they record all suspected or actual incidents and report these to the child's social worker as soon as possible by using the bullying form recording sheet.

The carer and social worker should formulate a plan to address the concerns and this should include:

- who should take to the child
- who else needs to be notified (e.g. schools, birth parents)
- whether any immediate action is needed to safeguard the child

After the concerns have been discussed with the child, and if bullying is confirmed or continues to be suspected, a protection plan should be drawn up to attempt to ensure the bullying ceases and does not re-occur.

The carer and social worker should draw up the plan with the involvement of relevant others who may include:

- the foster child
- other children in the household
- the foster child's birth parent(s)
- the bully
- the social workers and parents of other children in the foster home
- other relevant professional such as teachers and therapists

If the bullying is being carried out by someone outside of the foster home then attempts should be made to engage the child's parents in helping to put an end to the bullying. The social worker rather than the carer should normally undertake any contact with parents in such circumstances.

If your child is accused of bullying

Our children can also be the bullies and therefore foster carers are requested to be vigilant and act immediately. If a child in your care is accused of bullying others, you should:

- Challenge them about it immediately and ask them to think about the affects on others
- Discuss with their social worker how the situation can be best dealt with, e.g. help them to think of ways of making things better; try and help them work out why they are bullying; consider anger management techniques; consider direct work as appropriate;
- Help them to think about responses and or other ways of behaving where they will not feel they are losing face.

Responsibilities of the foster carer

The Fostering Service will ensure that all Foster Carers will have:

- Information in the induction packs for newly approved foster carers on bullying and how to stop bullying;
- Foster carers should attend the mandatory safer care training, which will provide information on bullying and how to deal with situations;
- Regular supervision with Supervising Social Workers that can address the issue of bullying and Anti-Discriminatory Practice Agenda;
- Access to sources of advice in how to deal with matters of bullying.
- The placement meeting will identify any risk of potential bullying highlighting any risk circumstances where bullying may occur. The risk assessment will take action to reduce or counteract the risk of bullying.
- To ensure that all recordings are completed immediately on the bullying recording form and that the social worker and or Supervising Social Worker is told at the next available opportunity.

Recording

Foster carers should record all suspected and actual incidents of bullying against or by any foster child in their care. These should be reported to the child's social worker as soon as possible, as well as the carer's supervising social worker. Medway Fostering Team will keep a central record of all reported incidents and the action taken to deal with them.

Foster carers approved by other agencies

When commissioning a foster placement from another fostering service provider, we will expect the carer to comply with this policy.

Responsibilities of the Supervising Social Worker

Fostering Supervising Social Workers will ensure:

- Regular contact is maintained with other parties involved in the child/young person's care to monitor potential incidents of bullying and act on them immediately;
- A written record of incidents of bullying will be recorded in the child's event diary by the Foster Carer and the bullying recording form is completed. The supervisor will record these details on the supervision form. All incidents regarding bullying will be shared with relevant parties i.e. parents, social workers, school, and where appropriate the Independent Review Officer.
- All children in care and young people have access to and understand the complaints procedure. All children in care and young people will have access to and know about how to contact Ofsted, Independent services, such as NYAS and or the Children's Rights Officer.
- Any incidents of bullying from outside the placement must be taken seriously and dealt with immediately. Following such incidents, Risk Assessments are to be put in place highlighting high-risk situations.
- Incidents of bullying will be monitored and addressed on a day-to-day basis, through staff supervision, team meetings, and general practice; the incidents will be reported to the Fostering Principal Manager immediately.

Safe caring guidelines

All carers are required to produce safe caring guidelines for their home and these must be approved by every placing social worker and explained to the child in placement and the family. Carers are requested to include details on how incidents of bullying will be dealt with in the home.

Standard 4 outlines that foster carers are required to actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children (4.2). Foster carers are also required to ensure that children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media (4.4).

Useful contacts

Advisory Centre for Education

Advice line for parents on parents on all matters concerning schools.
0207 354 8321

Anti Bullying Campaign.

Advice line for parents and children.
Tel: 0207 378 1446

Kidscape

Has a wide range of publications for young people, parents and teachers.
Bullying Counsellors are available Mon-Fri
Tel: 02077303300
<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/>

Childline

Free 24-hour help for children on all areas and subjects
Tel: 0800 1111.

Mobile and Text message bullying.

If you or someone you know is receiving text or calls that upset or offend, your network should have a number that you can to bar or report calls.

Parentline

Free confidential Help line for anyone looking after a child.
Tel: 0808 800 2222

CEOP

Child exploitation and online protection centre. Providing help and guidance to keep children and young people safe online. This includes information leaflets and online information video clips.
<http://ceop.police.uk/>

Equality advisory support service

The Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) was commissioned by Government in 2012 to replace the EHRC Helpline Contact the EASS if you need expert information, advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues and the applicable law, especially if you need more help than advice agencies and other local organisations can provide.

Phone: 0808 800 0082
<http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Runnymede trust

An independent agency who deals with issues of racial equality and justice.
Te: 0207 3779222

Reported incidents of bullying

Warrington Borough Council reinforces a clear expectation that any form of bullying is totally unacceptable. Any child who has been bullied should be supported and those who bully given help and guidance to prevent them from continuing doing so. Warrington borough council employees and foster cares should act proactively and intervene positively to the act of bullying.

Foster carer name: Child/young persons' name: Child/young persons date of birth: Date of incident:
Location of incident:
Nature of incident
Who reported to: Date reported: Advice given
Outcome
Further action or review

**NB All situations must be reviewed and reported directly to the school, child or young person's social worker and supervising social worker.
Please refer to National Minimum Standards 2011, Standard 3 and Fostering Regulations 2011, volume 4, which states that 'Foster carers should protect children from significant harm, including abuse, accidents, bullying or negative attitudes'**