



Safeguarding children who are or have received services from Adoption Central England (ACE)

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1. Safeguarding children in adoptive families

- 1.1 The Extended Practice Review into the death of an adopted child in Cardiff (2018) cautions agencies against making assumptions that children placed for adoption or adopted are safe from harm. Whilst the review concluded that the death of the child could not have been foreseen, the review reminded agencies that '*adoption does not negate the need for safeguarding awareness*'. Whilst it is rare for any child placed for adoption to be harmed by their adoptive parents, practices of both the local authorities and the adoption agency could be strengthened ensuring that a level of professional curiosity is maintained regarding the child's experiences in placement.
- 1.2 Further the Adoption Minimum Standards July 2014 require:

- Adoption agencies and adoption support agencies work effectively with agencies concerned with child protection e.g. the responsible authority, schools, hospitals, general practitioners, etc. and do not work in isolation from them (standard 4.3).

1.3 This procedure has been developed in accordance with Standard 22 that states that *allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation*, and sets out the following requirements under this standard:

- The duty to refer information to statutory bodies.
- A copy of the child protection procedures is made available to staff, volunteers, prospective adopters and children.
- The child protection procedures are submitted for consideration and comment to ... senior officer responsible for child protection matters in that department.
- They are consistent with the local policies and procedures ... relevant to the geographical area where the prospective adopters live.
- Allegations against people that work with children, prospective adopters or adult members of their household, are reported by the agency to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). This includes allegations that on the face of it may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or Children and Family Services.
- A clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a prospective adopter or member of the prospective adopters' household, or staff member or volunteer, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on

the prospective adopter's or person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age or for ten years if this is longer. In respect of prospective adopters or adult members the information is retained on their case record for 100 years from the date of the adoption order.

- The adoption panel that dealt with the case is informed of any allegations made and outcomes of investigations.
- Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly, quickly, and consistently in a way that provides effective protection for the child, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.
- The adoption support agency has written procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse which may be made by service users during service provision.

1.4 This procedure applies to

- children who are placed for adoption with ACE approved adoptive families,
- who have been adopted by those families,
- who are in receipt of adoption support services through ACE,
- adopted adults who report historical instances of abuse.

2. General duties to safeguard and protect children placed for adoption

2.1 Safeguarding awareness is promoted with ACE staff through an annual safeguarding training event. Also, in line with ACE philosophy adoptive parents are supported and encouraged to parent therapeutically drawing from the principles of practice derived from Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP). This approach aims to help adoptive parents to develop highly nurturing, attuned and responsive parenting

to promote healthy brain development and the formation of strong relationships and emotional bonds between adoptive parents and their children, thereby reducing the risk of potential safeguarding concerns.

- 2.2 The preparation and assessment of prospective ACE adopters encourages prospective adoptive parents to understand the experiences of children who require adoption and the reasons for no smacking policies to apply. Alternative strategies are discussed throughout the process that serve to educate prospective adopters about handling and managing children's behaviour and safe caring practices.
- 2.3 The assessment will investigate more closely prospective adopters' attitudes towards handling children's behaviour based on their own experiences of being parented and the expectations within their social network. The process will introduce prospective adopters to the principles of therapeutic parenting, PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) and theraplay and the prospective adopters assessment report will provide an analysis of how they have understood these issues and the parenting approaches they intend to adopt as prospective adoptive parents.
- 2.4 Personal references undertaken by ACE will specifically address safe caring practices within the family and will seek evidence of their relationships with, and handling of, children wherever possible. The process will also involve references and/or interviews with previous partners and/or their children where further evidence can be obtained about parenting capacity and understanding of children's needs.
- 2.5 ACE will make available to prospective and existing adoptive parents across the region, a range of training and support services that will serve to enhance care and parenting of their adopted child/ren. This includes Non-Violence Resistance training and Therapeutic and Sensory Based Parenting.

3. Investigation into current allegations of harm or abuse

- 3.1 In line with the above standard the allegation of harm against a child that implicates members of the adoptive parents' household will be dealt with under the Safeguarding Children's Board procedures that apply to the local authority where the adoptive family reside.
- 3.2 When an allegation is received by ACE it will be the responsibility of the local authority Safeguarding Children's Team to determine whether the matter constitutes an allegation of abuse, or whether it is a cause of concern that does not meet the threshold for safeguarding procedures to be invoked.
- 3.3 In circumstances where an ACE worker is aware of safeguarding concerns, following immediate discussion with an ACE manager the referral will be made to the relevant local authority within one working day.
- 3.4 Where the initial enquiries indicate an actual or potential safeguarding matter the social worker appointed to investigate the allegation should have no previous involvement with child/ren in the household or the prospective adopter/adoptive parent.
- 3.5 Where a Strategy Discussion under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, is necessary the local authority will ensure that the ACE social worker and ACE manager are included in the meeting.
- 3.6 The Strategy Discussion will need to take into account the following additional considerations:
 - the nature of the information and support to be given to the prospective adopters/adoptive parents during the investigation;

- whether any other children should be interviewed;
 - how much information should be shared with birth parents and others involved in the child's life.
- 3.7 When the enquiries or investigation are completed the outcome will determine whether the Local Authority will convene an Initial Child Protection Conference or take no further action under the safeguarding procedures. Where the latter applies a post enquiries/investigation meeting should be convened including the ACE social worker and manager that will consider the outcome and advise whether the adoptive parents require specific training or additional support and how this will be accessed.

4. Causes of concern for children placed for adoption or adopted

- 4.1 Causes of concern may arise for the welfare of a child who has been placed for adoption or is adopted when family members or other professionals notice that the prospective adopters'/adopter's attitude or responses towards the child appear inappropriate for the child's age, stage of development or level of need.
- 4.2 In such circumstances these concerns will be recorded and reported to either the child's social worker to take appropriate action or be referred by the ACE worker to the local authority Children's Safeguarding Services where the family reside within one working day.
- 4.3 Following receipt of this information or referral a discussion with an ACE manager should be initiated and a decision made about convening an Adoption Support Meeting including the prospective/approved adopters and their social worker. The meeting, chaired by the local authority Children's Team manager, should

highlight the concerns and, unless there are immediate risks to the child, should seek to offer support and strategies to the prospective/approved adopters aimed at enhancing their relationship, understanding and responses towards the child. Some of these supports and services will be available through ACE.

- 4.4 However, should the concerns continue or remain significant the meeting will need to consider whether this is an appropriate placement for the child.
- 4.5 Where the decision is taken by the local authority to remove the child, this should be managed if possible, in a planned way and in line with safeguarding policies and procedures under the appropriate legislation.
- 4.6 Where the child is not yet adopted and in circumstances where a child is removed from prospective adopters a Disruption Review Meeting or Practice Learning Review should be convened and the report presented to the local authority senior manager and/or agency decision maker.
- 4.7 Any learning from the Disruption Review Meeting or Practice Learning Review will be collated in the annual report that is presented to the ACE Executive Board and shared more widely across Children's Services in the ACE region.

5. Allegations against adoptive parents who are local authority employees

- 5.1 ACE has adoptive parents who may also be employees of one of its constituent local authorities. In circumstances where a safeguarding or cause for concern is raised the matter will always be directed to the local authority Children's Safeguarding Services in the area where the family lives as soon as possible following discussion with an ACE manager.

- 5.2 Information should be sought from ACE about the nature of the family's contact or involvement with ACE and the allocated ACE social worker (where applicable) and ACE manager should be informed of decisions/actions arising from the referral.
- 5.3 The local authority Children's Safeguarding Services is to determine whether their Designated Officer (LADO) is to be informed and if the employer should be informed of the referral also.
- 5.4 Where safeguarding children's procedures are invoked ACE will look to support the family through the process.

6. Allegations of historical abuse

- 6.1 Where information is received by ACE relating to historical abuse within an adoptive placement, the matter following discussion with an ACE Manager will be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice as soon as possible.
- 6.2 Following this a decision will be made whether a multiagency meeting is required in line with local procedures.
- 6.3 Immediate consideration will need to be given to the safety and welfare of any children who are in contact with the family and appropriate action taken.
- 6.4 As part of the process information from various sources may be required and ACE will cooperate with the disclosure of adoption records that may be required in supporting a possible criminal investigation.

- 6.5 Counselling support to parties affected will also be considered and ACE will allocate a social worker to support the adoptive family during the investigation in line with standard 22 as outlined above.

7. Monitoring safeguarding in ACE

- 7.1 Under the ACE Governance requirements the Executive Board will receive reports of allegations against adoptive parents on a quarterly basis. This information is also reported to OFSTED as part of the annual return.
- 7.2 The ACE Lead Manager will also initiate discussions about specific situations or on broader safeguarding matters with local authorities' partners across the region, where these will present opportunities to improve practice or services to adoptive families.

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