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| Sheffield City Council  Fostering Service  Policy on the Fostering Helpline for Foster Carers  January 2023 |  |

1. Purpose of Out of Hours Support for Foster Carers

The Sheffield City Council Fostering Service (The Service) is committed to providing 24-hour support, every day of the year to ensure that Carers feel confident that they can contact the Service’s qualified staff whenever they need support or there is an emergency.

1. Fostering Out of Hours Helpline (Fostering Helpline)

How to Contact Fostering Helpline

If you require any advice, support or assistance, have a concern about the child or there is an emergency as outlined below, please call the Fostering Helpline on:

**0114 2056555**

unless there is an immediate serious risk to the child or others, in which case, you must contact 999 first.

If the matter is not urgent, please pause and reflect if the matter can wait until the following morning when you can speak with your supervising social worker or a duty worker during normal office hours.

**The Fostering Helpline operates between the hours of 5.45pm and 8.45am from Monday to Friday AM, and from 4.45pm Friday to 8.45am Monday. The Helpline also operates 24/7 on Bank Holidays.**

Your call will be put through to the work mobile of a social worker from the Service who is on call that evening. There is only one Fostering Helpline worker on duty at any one time and the staff do not operate a waking night so your phone call may be waking them up. The Fostering Helpline worker will only deal with concerns over the telephone.

The Fostering Helpline staff will aim to answer your call straight away. It might be that the Fostering Helpline worker is busy on other calls. If this is the case, please leave a message on the voice mail system (including your name and contact number) and they will call you back as soon as possible.

Any contact and advice that has been offered to you will be recorded on your electronic record and shared with your supervising social worker and their manager so that they can follow up any support needs required. When appropriate, the child’s social worker will also be notified.

Informing the Fostering Helpline of an Emergency/Significant Incidents

There are times when Foster Carers must contact the Service immediately so that the Service can ensure that all necessary procedures are followed by the Carer, the Service and other relevant agencies and to ensure that children and Carers are protected and supported. For example, a Carer with a fostered child with an injury might not realise that the Service may need to complete an incident form or that the child’s birth parent can make an allegation against the Carer or a complaint against the Service; the Helpline worker will guide the Carer on what necessary steps they need to take.

You must inform the Service immediately should any of the following occur:

* A child/young person is placed with you on an out of hours basis.
* If a child/young person goes missing, runs away, or you are concerned that they may have been abducted. This includes when the child/young person does not return home by the agreed curfew or has not been in contact with you as agreed and this is unusual, and you tried to locate them and waited a reasonable time frame for their age. In addition to this, follow the [Children Missing from Care Policy and Procedure](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/sheffield/missing.html) (<https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/sheffield/missing.html>). You will also need to contact the police.

Where there is a specific plan regarding missing episodes for the child (outlined, for example, in the child’s Placement Plan or Safe Care Plan Child Specific Risk Assessment), follow that plan instead.

* If a child/young person makes an allegation of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect against anybody, including yourself or a member of your family, or you are concerned that abuse may have occurred.
* If a child/young person has an injury (which is beyond small accidental scratches or bruises on the children’s arms or legs common for children of the same age) or causes an injury to others, or serious damage to objects.
* If a child/young person becomes very violent or out of control.
* If there is an incident involving the Police. Please ensure you record the name(s) of the police officer(s) involved, from which police station and the crime number (if appropriate).
* If you believe that a child/young person may have been excessively drinking alcohol or using/supplying illicit drugs.
* If you believe that a young person may be involved in or groomed for child sexual abuse.
* If you believe that a child/young person may be involved in or about to become involved in a high-risk activity.
* If a serious accident or illness has occurred involving a child/young person requiring medical attention or hospitalisation; include the hospital to which the child is being taken. If the child/young person has already been treated, inform us at which hospital and the name of the doctor concerned.
* If you fall ill and are unable to care for a child/young person placed. If possible, we would ask in the first instance that you use your emergency agreed support network, however if this is not possible then the Service will identify an emergency support care placement.
* If a child/young person dies.
* If an emergency or other situation occurs in your family which means that you may be unable to continue to care for a child/young person.
* If emergency restrictions on contact made to protect a child/young person from significant risk are not being adhered to, e.g. if a person posing a risk to the child comes to your house.
* If there are significant issues with birth family and/or family time. You can also contact the Family Time Team on: **0114 203 9082** (Monday to Friday) or Out of Hours: **07827835111** or **07827835110**.

The Service will respond and take whatever action is thought necessary and appropriate to support and assist you and any child/young person placed in your care.

There may be times when an ‘emergency’ turns out to be a false alarm, such as the child reappearing shortly after you notified the Fostering Helpline that they were missing. If this is the case, please inform the Fostering Helpline straightaway.

Additional support provided by the Fostering Helpline

You may receive a telephone call by the Helpline worker that has been requested by your supervising social worker, team manager, placement staff or other social worker staff. This may occur, for example, when you have a new placement or there is a significant situation that was not resolved during office hours and the situation may arise again before the usual office hours. The purpose of the call would be to get an update on the situation and provide any necessary advice/support to you and the child/young person placed in your care.

Professionals from other services such as the Emergency Duty Team, Police or Health may also contact the Fostering Helpline for information, support and advice.

Contacting the Emergency Services

As a Foster Carer you must always act in the best interests of a child/young person placed in your care and as such must contact the Emergency Services (Tel: **999**) straightaway if a child or young person is at immediate risk, needs rescuing or immediate medical assistance. Please call 999 before calling the Fostering Helpline.

There may be times when an ‘emergency’ turns out to be a false alarm after calling 999. If this is the case, please inform any emergency services involved straightaway.

Contacting the Emergency Duty Team (EDT):

Children’s Social Care also operate an out of hours service; this is staffed by children’s social workers who are not part of the Fostering Service. The service has a phone line and undertakes visits when necessary.

Generally, this is for children in the community when children are found to be at risk of significant harm and support or action cannot wait until normal office hours. They will work closely alongside police. However, in some situations (for example when children are unable to remain in placement, are missing or there are significant allegations), they may get involved with children in foster care.

You can contact the service directly on **0114 273 4855** or via **101.** However, the advice would be to contact the Fostering Helpline first and when necessary the Helpline worker will contact EDT on your behalf. If the situation is urgent and you cannot get through the Fostering Helpline, you are advised to contact EDT directly.

During Normal Office Hours

During office hours the Fostering Helpline number is not available and any requests for assistance should be made via your own social worker, the social worker for the child or if unavailable through one of the following services:

**Fostering Duty: Tel: 0114 273 4940**

**Placement Finding: Tel: 0114 273 4532**

**Connected Carer Team Duty:** **Tel:** **0114 273 6489.**

This policy was agreed and signed off by: Anne-Marie Banks (Service manager)

Date: 19/01/2023