



## Child Protection and Supporting Safeguarding Policy



## Introduction

These procedures relate to safeguarding children and concerns or suspicion of child abuse has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

## Core principles

- Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility; everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play
- Following Whispers Family Consultancy fostering promote early intervention to tackle any safeguarding concerns as soon as they emerge
- Children in care are at the centre of our service provision, their needs are paramount and they must be listened to by professionals and have their voices heard;
- Following Whispers Family Consultancy fostering is focused on achieving measurable positive outcomes for children in care
- Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering will ensure all people deployed for promoting its children services receive training development and supervision around: being alert to children and their needs, understanding their individual role in keeping children safe and their role in being able to identify symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect and share information with other professionals in a timely way
- The agency ensures that all staff are aware about the Kent Inter-Agency Threshold Criteria for Children and Young People and the processes around how to react to such criteria, if there is a concern.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the agency risk assessment policy and other relevant Following Whispers Family Consultancy procedures such as children missing from care, safeguarding from sexual exploitation, Radicalisation and safeguarding sexually active children.

All children who are living in Kent are under the protection of Kent County Council Kent Children's services. Kent has a statutory duty to investigate where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. Children living in other areas are under the protection of their relevant area authority. Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering hold information on each relevant authority, including each relevant Local Authority Designated Officer. (LADO).

Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering therefore adopts and follows the guiding principles and policy of the local authority in which each child resides, based on Working Together to Safeguard children.

## Recognition and Definitions of Child Abuse

This document provides guidance for foster carers and staff, to clarify the circumstances in which to tell a Following Whispers Family Consultancy senior staff member and address an individual need to safeguard children before any matter is referred to Local Authority child protection services.

- a. Child abuse and neglect require the involvement of Social Services and Police whenever a child or young person up to the age of 18 years has suffered or may be at risk of suffering significant harm due to the actions of his or her parents or carers or others responsible for his or her care. Where abuse occurs from some other source, the matter will also require the investigation of Police and Social Services to ensure that future risks to the identified child and other children are minimised and appropriate services provided.
- b. When a professional is aware that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm from abuse or neglect, a referral must be made to either Social Services or Police, in line with the local child protection procedures in which the child is residing. This applies to all cases of risk. Where there is immediate danger to a child the Police or Social Services must be contacted immediately.
- c. The definitions of abuse and significant harm are contained in the guidance in Part 2 of *'Working Together to Safeguard Children'*. They relate to: -



- **Physical abuse** – this 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 feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill health to a child whom they are looking after. This situation is commonly described using terms such as factitious illness by proxy or Munchausen syndrome by proxy.
- **Emotional abuse** – is the persistent ill-treatment 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 feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve 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 ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.
- **Sexual abuse** – involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape or buggery) or non-penetrative acts. This may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- **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. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

A child may suffer or be at risk of suffering from one or more types of abuse and abuse may take place on a single occasion or may occur repeatedly over time.

Abuse as described above may be experienced in various ways including through the internet and via telephone, messaging and other communication systems.

In deciding whether the harm caused to a child is significant, the definitions contained in the Children Act 1989 should be considered.

The question of whether harm is significant relates to the individual child's health or development compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.

Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering staff, foster carers, consultants, volunteers, support workers and other professionals should consider:

- a. The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his/her age and understanding);
- b. His/her physical, emotional and educational needs;
- c. The likely effect on him/her of any change in his/her circumstances;
- d. His/her age, sex, background and any characteristics which the court considers relevant;
- e. Any harm which s/he has suffered or is at risk of suffering;
- f. How capable each of his/her parents, and any other person in relation to whom the court considers the question to be relevant, is of meeting his/her needs.

**Harm** – means ill treatment or the impairment of health or development.

**Development** – means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development.

**Health** – means physical or mental health.

**Ill-treatment** – includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical.



Safeguarding is not just about protecting children from deliberate harm. It can include issues such as:

- Health and safety;
- Bullying;
- Racist abuse;
- Discrimination;
- Harassment;
- Drug and other substance abuse;
- Internet safety;
- Gang activity;
- Safeguarding girls at risk of abuse through female genital mutilation
- Safeguarding children at risk of sexual exploitation & grooming
- Safeguarding children exposed to extremist ideology.

Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering strives to work in partnership with children’s Placing Local Authorities as well as the Local Authorities our foster carers live.

### Signs and Indicators

Every child and young person is unique and it is difficult to predict how their behaviour will change as a result of their experience of abuse. Listed below are some physical signs and behavioural indicators that may be commonly seen in children and young people who are abused but remember they may only be an indication and not confirmation that abuse has taken place.

Physical Abuse	
Physical Signs	Behavioural Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unexplained bruising, marks or injuries on any part of the body;</li> <li>• Bruises which reflect hand marks or fingertips (from slapping or pinching);</li> <li>• Cigarette burns;</li> <li>• Bite marks;</li> <li>• Broken bones;</li> <li>• Scalds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of parents being approached for an explanation;</li> <li>• Aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts;</li> <li>• Flinching when approached or touched;</li> <li>• Reluctance to get changed, for example wearing long sleeves in hot weather;</li> <li>• Depression;</li> <li>• Withdrawn behaviour;</li> <li>• Running away from home.</li> </ul>

Emotional Abuse	
Physical Signs	Behavioural Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A failure to thrive or grow;</li> <li>• Sudden speech disorders;</li> <li>• Developmental delay, either in terms of physical or emotional progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neurotic behaviour, e.g. hair twisting, rocking;</li> <li>• Being unable to play;</li> <li>• Fear of making mistakes;</li> <li>• Self-harm;</li> <li>• Fear of parent being approached regarding their behaviour.</li> </ul>

Sexual Abuse	
Physical Signs	Behavioural Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain or Itching in the genital/anal areas;</li> <li>• Bruising or bleeding near genital/anal areas;</li> <li>• Sexually transmitted infection;</li> <li>• Vaginal discharge or infection;</li> <li>• Stomach pains;</li> <li>• Discomfort when walking or sitting down;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour, e.g. becoming aggressive or withdrawn;</li> <li>• Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people;</li> <li>• Having nightmares;</li> <li>• Running away from home;</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnancy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual knowledge which is beyond their age or development age;</li> <li>• Sexual drawings or language;</li> <li>• Bedwetting;</li> <li>• Saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone about;</li> <li>• Self-harm or mutilation, sometimes leading to suicide attempts;</li> <li>• Eating problems such as overeating or anorexia.</li> </ul>
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Neglect	
Physical Signs	Behavioural Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant hunger, sometimes stealing food from others;</li> <li>• Constantly dirty or 'smelly';</li> <li>• Loss of weight, or being constantly underweight;</li> <li>• Inappropriate dress for the conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaining of being tired all the time;</li> <li>• Not requesting medical assistance and/or failing to attend appointments;</li> <li>• Having few friends;</li> <li>• Mentioning their being left alone or Unsupervised.</li> </ul>

It is important to remember that many children and young people will exhibit some of these signs and indicators at some time, and the presence of one or more should not be taken as proof that abuse is occurring. However by using the Kent Inter-Agency Threshold Criteria for Children and Young People and the processes around how to react to such criteria if there is a concern should enable KCB to agree with your initial referral criteria grading or escalate your threshold grading based on the evidence available.

There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes significant harm. For this reason, any professional who is in doubt as to whether a referral should be made to either Social Services or Police should seek consultation with experienced colleagues. Local child protection teams are available for consultation to assist professionals in their decision regarding referral.

Information about abuse in the past should be referred in the same way as current concerns so that possible offences may be investigated and other children and young people can be protected even when there is no apparent risk to the child now.

Kent: Contacting Central Duty Team  
 Secure e-mail:  
[CentralDutyTeam@kent.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:CentralDutyTeam@kent.gcsx.gov.uk)  
 Standard e-mail:  
[central.duty@kent.gov.uk](mailto:central.duty@kent.gov.uk)  
 Fax: 03000 412345  
 Phone: 03000 411111

Urgent referrals that cannot wait until the next working day should be referred to the Out of Hours team by **phone on: 03000 419191**. Referrers will normally remain confidential but may have to be revealed for the purposes of subsequent legal actions taken in respect of the child or abusers.

### Child Protection Procedures

#### What to do if you know or fear that a child has suffered or may be at risk of suffering physical emotional or sexual abuse.

If you are a Foster Carer: -You must contact your Supervising Social Worker or the Registered Manager of Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering (in the absence of the Manager your next contact should be Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering Senior Practitioner) and inform them of your concerns. If it is possible, you should prepare written notes straight away of your concerns and if you are describing an event, record any relevant dates and times.



If you are a Support Worker or Sessional Worker: -You should immediately inform the Responsible Individual or another Senior Manager in the first instance. The Responsible Individual (Registered Person) or the Registered Manager is responsible for implementing the Child Protection Procedure.

The Following Whispers Family Consultancy Designated Senior Practitioner (Child Protection coordinator) has overall responsibility for informing Children's Services of any child protection concerns. The decision as to whether a referral should be made to the relevant Children's Services will be made by the Child Protection Co-ordinator, with the Directors of the agency notified. Children's Services in the area you reside are available for advice or consultation, prior to a formal referral being made.

The duty officer of a looked after child's placing authority will be informed of concerns and/or referrals to the appropriate area child protection team as soon as practicable after the fostering agency is made aware of any matter related to child protection.

If an incident occurs outside of office hours, contact the Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering out of hours' service, who will contact the Responsible Individual or the Registered Manager.

### **Referral to Children's Services**

If any member of staff, carer or member of the public brings a concern to our attention, believing that a child is in need of support and services, or is at risk of suffering or has suffered significant harm, we would encourage them or will ourselves make a referral to children's services. In most circumstances the agreement of the parents/carers of the child should be sought before a referral is made, providing this will not place the child at an increased risk of harm. If a professional has any concern that informing a parent/carers may place a child at risk or may compromise Police evidence, immediate advice must be sought from either the Social services or Police. Should a parent or carer withhold their agreement to a referral being made consideration should be given to the impact this may have on the level of concern for the child's welfare and the parent's or carer's ability to meet the child's needs.

Any Professional referrer having doubts regarding the need to refer to Children's Services, should consult with the designated professional with special responsibility for child protection matters within their own agency (Following Whispers Family Consultancy Responsible Individual or the Registered Manager and in the absence of the Responsible individual the Manager or a Senior Social Worker Practitioner). Where further advice or consultation is necessary, Children's Services will be available for consultation as indicated in the paragraphs below:

- In situations where there is no immediate risk to the child, professionals should make the referral in writing after having checked out on the telephone with children's services that there is no information held to suggest an immediate risk, using the agreed standard format, which may be posted or sent by secure e-mail to the appropriate Social Service office. The referral should give full details of the child and all other family members, information about the family's circumstances, composition and history, which other agencies are involved with the family and whether, if known, there have been previous referrals to Social Services. It is important to clarify the reason for the child being referred, the exact nature of the concerns, why and how they have arisen and what assessment, support or services the referring professional considers may be required. Concerns about abuse or neglect should be clearly identified.
- In situations where a professional believes a child may be in need of emergency protection, or that action is necessary, either the Police or Social Service should be contacted by telephone. The referrer should give details of the child and family if known, the reason why immediate action may be necessary, where the child is and whether he/she should remain there or be removed to a safe place. The referrer should also clarify whether the parents/carers have been made aware of the concerns and the referral. If there is any indication of a risk of violence or aggression towards the staff who will respond to the referral this should also be communicated. Referrals made by telephone must be followed up in writing within two working days using the standard referral format.



It is the responsibility of the Duty Manager, Social Services, to decide about what course of action will be taken within 24 hours of the referral being received. This decision will be made following discussion with the referring professional and consideration of any records of previous or current involvement with the child and other family members. The Duty Manager will make one of the following decisions:

- No further action by Social Services.
- Provision of Information and advice or referral to a more appropriate service, but no further action by Social Services.
- Referral to LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)
- Initial assessment required.
- Immediate s.47 enquiry required and/or emergency action to protect the child, in accordance with s.47 of the Children Act 1989.

The Following Whispers Family Consultancy designated senior practitioner will be responsible for ensuring the notifying Ofsted (Schedule 7 notifications) regarding any concern about child welfare or safety and will also notify the LADO in the case of an allegation against carers, staff or other members of the children's workforce. The related supervising social worker is to write up such concerns that must be supported by the views of an agency senior manager. In the allocated supervising social worker's absence, the agency will allocate another social worker to write the schedule 7 report - supported by the views of an agency senior manager.

#### **Concerns about Colleagues, Carers and other childcare Professionals**

A clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations against staff or carers, including how the allegation was followed up and resolved will be kept in the confidential section of that person's file, in line with 22.7 of the NMS 2011.

For foster carers, as soon as an investigation is concluded, a review of approval will be carried out and the outcome of such reviews will be presented to the Following Whispers Family Consultancy fostering panel. Further information for carers on allegations against themselves as carers are detailed in information for carers on dealing with allegations, which includes support available to them, in the agency allegations against staff and foster carers policy. This includes financial and independent social work support or other.

#### **Considerations to measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents.**

Under regulation 12 (3) (e), Fostering Service regulations and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, there will be occasions following allegation, to protect a child either the alleged perpetrator or the child is withdrawn from the Foster home.

A senior Following Whispers Family Consultancy practitioner or manager must inform the LADO of all details. Reporting to the LADO must not be delayed for the purposes of further information gathering or informal investigation by the Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering, as this may impede, prejudice or otherwise harm a future official investigation, as well as potentially increasing the length of time in which the child in question remains at risk of harm.

Any disclosure or allegation of abuse by a child or young person in placement will also be reported to the child's local authority social worker and to the appropriate local safeguarding children/child protection team contact if the child is placed outside their home authority, without delay. Where a child from another local authority is also in placement, that child's social worker will also be informed. Ofsted will also be notified of certain events under Schedule 7 of the fostering regulations (2011).

Once informed, the LADO will decide as to how the investigation should proceed in discussion with the designated manager. The discussion must first determine if the allegation has, or may have, any foundation. If it does not, no Child Protection and Supporting Safeguarding Policy – Updated January 2019



further action will be taken. Following

Whispers Family Consultancy will, however, make and keep a full written record of the outcome and provide and explain this to both alleged perpetrator and the child.

We have a duty of care to the child in placement who has made the disclosure (or regarding whose welfare the disclosure has been made), and it will be appropriate for Following Whispers Family Consultancy to take certain steps, which includes conducting a risk assessment, to support and safeguard the child's welfare while the investigation is ongoing and after it concludes.

### **Immediate threshold considerations/Will the child be removed?**

If the child in question is known or suspected to have suffered or be at risk of suffering immediate serious harm, the police must be informed immediately and before following other investigation procedures. The child's safeguarding must and will always be paramount. The Police have the authority to remove a child in an emergency immediately.

To ensure the child is safe, in consultation with the Local Authority a decision may include asking the alleged perpetrator to leave the home during the investigation, or for the child who has made the allegation to move in the first instance temporarily to alternative carers. The Local Authority and the LADO will lead the decisions that underpin this.

If the foster family is a couple and there is a decision that the alleged perpetrator could leave the home and is willing to do so, there will need to be a comprehensive risk assessment conducted jointly by the Local Authority and Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering to determine the level of risk for the child remaining in the home as well as any other child living within the fostering household.

In all situations assessment of Risk will be undertaken and a new risk assessment for the child completed.

If the Local Authority investigating the allegation consider the child to be at risk in order to safeguard their welfare the child would be removed. They can also decide to remove other children in the care of the alleged foster carer/s. If it is agreed that a child should move during a period of investigation, in addition to a new Risk assessment being completed, if the child can move to a Following Whispers Family Consultancy family, a new Matching form will be completed by a Following Whispers Family Consultancy social worker.

### **Process**

The correct and prompt reporting of a disclosure as described above are first steps. The second part of this process is full co-operation and collaboration with any investigation as requested by the investigating parties: if Following Whispers Family Consultancy Fostering is adjudged by the investigating authorities to have a role to play in information gathering, facilitating meetings or interviews or more, the designated manager will ensure that all such assistance is provided promptly and to the highest possible standard. The third step is strict adherence to all relevant information sharing or confidentiality protocols that may be insisted upon the investigating authorities to ensure that the child's safety is not jeopardised, nor the ongoing investigation prejudiced, by breaches of confidentiality.

Additional action required is likely to be determined by the nature of the case. It may be necessary to support the child to deal with the emotional and/or physical trauma caused by actual, suspected or threatened abuse relating to the disclosure. This may include therapeutic intervention or other additional support from Following Whispers Family Consultancy professionals.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to consider the implications of the allegation for the security and viability of the child's placement. For example, if the disclosure relates to an incident, incidents, individual or individuals near to the fostering environment, or near to school, it may be necessary to reconsider whether that



placement or school continue to remain the best options for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the child in question. Of course, any decision as to whether a change to placement arrangements will be necessary or beneficial must be made through consultation with the child's local authority social worker, foster carers, parents (where appropriate), other professionals around the child and, most importantly, the child him/herself.

The child in question will also be supported both during and after an investigation to deal with any potential mental or physical trauma resulting from the alleged incident or incidents, plus the potential stress caused by the investigation itself. This may include access to therapy, or a reconsideration of how alleged abuse may have affected the child's feelings about certain environments (e.g. the fostering environment, the agency's premises) and how adjustments to placement arrangements can be made to ameliorate this.

Senior management collates and evaluates information on the circumstances; number and outcome of any allegation of abuse or neglect of children or young people in foster care. Information gathered, together with up to date external information and guidance, will continue to inform the development of good safeguarding practice.

#### **If unfounded allegation**

It may be necessary to work with and support the child in question to find the underlying reasons as to why an unfounded allegation was made.

If there is suspicion that the allegation was a malicious one, this will be managed in-house within the relevant processes incorporating L A and other relevant professionals. Equally, the LADO and designated manager may conclude that whilst the issue raised does not constitute an allegation of abuse or justify investigation as such, there may be issues of poor professional conduct, best practice not being followed etc. In such a circumstance the Following Whispers Family Consultancy's disciplinary and/or complaints procedures will apply.

The young person who made the complaint/allegation will be informed how they may make representations via the Following Whispers Family Consultancy and their placing authority's complaints procedures.

If it is established that the concern or allegation warrants further action, the designated manager and LADO will determine where information regarding the allegation is lacking, how and by whom this should be obtained. Questions around informing parents/carers will be discussed in line with best practice on confidentiality and information sharing.

Even if the basic placement arrangements remain the same following investigation into a disclosure, it will be necessary to re-evaluate risk-assessment and safer caring plans.

The above procedures will also take place to determine how the child in question found him/herself in a situation where abuse in the community was possible, and to establish ways in which this risk might be minimised in future. This is particularly likely to be the case if the investigation into the disclosure reveals that the child in question is at a higher risk of abuse, trafficking or involvement in criminal activity in the community than was previously recognised at placement planning stage.

What is key is that the agency ensures that while an investigation into the disclosure is ongoing and after it concludes, the child in question is safeguarded fully.

All agency staff and foster carers may contact Ofsted regarding any concerns of child welfare and safety.

