

# Allegations in Foster Care Toolkit: The 5 Ps Model

## Best Practice Guidance





# Contents

<b>Introduction from CEO</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction to the toolkit	5
Impact: Children and foster carers	6
Complaint, concern and allegation?	9
Investigation process	10
Outcomes	11
Reframing allegations: The 5 Ps Model	13
Prepare	14
Plan	20
Prevent	22
Proportionate	26
Protection	30
Importance of communication	35
Meetings, roles and responsibilities	37
Conclusion of the process	51
Moving on: A restorative approach	57
Historic allegations	59

## List of tables

<b>Table 1:</b> Key factors: Complaints, concerns and allegations	9
<b>Table 2:</b> Best practice approaches for safeguarding children during an investigation	24
<b>Table 3:</b> Summary of best practice for supporting foster carers during the allegation process	34
<b>Table 4:</b> Meetings	37
<b>Table 5:</b> Allegations process map	49

## Appendix

<b>Appendix 1:</b> Table 1. Legislation	60
<b>Appendix 2:</b> Template 1. Fostering service report for professional strategy meeting	65





# Introduction from CEO



As a supervising social worker, I supported many fostering families through the allegation process. I can recall almost every one of those families, along with the variety of emotions that they shared with me at the time. Fear, sadness, loss, regret, and frustration to name but a few. I remember the children that were moved from their foster home as a direct result of the allegation. An 18-month-old little girl, moved in an emergency to a new family, just weeks before she was due to be moving on to her adopted family; a ten-year-old boy who had been thriving with his fostering family since he was three – this was the only home he knew; and a sibling group where there was no option but to separate the children, in an emergency, due to a lack of suitable options. They said goodbye to each other at the school gates and were not returned to live together again.

Safeguarding is, and always will be, everyone's responsibility, and the examples that I share above were all decisions that were made by professionals acting on their duty to safeguard children from harm. Skilled and experienced practitioners who believed that this approach was required to secure immediate safety. In each of the examples above, the outcome of investigations, often lasting many weeks or months, was unfounded. The evidence presented enabled professionals to conclude that the alleged event did not occur. However, the impact of the process was irreparable. The children and adults involved experienced trauma which led to several unintended consequences. Foster carers and fostering social workers tell us that these situations are increasing and everyone in the sector agrees that we should be working to do everything that we can to improve outcomes for children. It may be that removing children from their foster family is the only option, however, within this guide we explore and propose a child centred, trauma informed approach to managing the allegations process, whilst still upholding safeguarding requirements at all times.





The research and evidence in respect of allegations in foster care across the UK remains limited. This is something that is urgently needed to inform practice; however, from the insight and data that we do have some trends are clear. The number of children looked after across the UK is increasing, the number of foster carers across the UK is decreasing. The majority of looked after children are living within foster care, and every year a proportion of these children will be moved from their (often stable and loving) foster home because of a safeguarding concern.

Choosing to foster, translates into choosing to be a 'person in a position of trust', under UK safeguarding law. Just as for all those who choose to work with children, this position comes with great responsibility and applicants should be subject to rigorous preparation, checks and assessment. We will explore

this further within the guide and make recommendations in respect of opportunities to build sector awareness and 'normalise' learning and preparation for allegations in foster care.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to all the young people, foster carers and practitioners that engaged with us in the production of this resource. Your insight, reflections and constructive feedback are at the heart of everything that we do.

Whatever your role in the fostering community I hope you will find this practice guide and toolkit a useful resource.

Sarah Thomas





# Introduction to the toolkit

The aim of this toolkit is to provide a guide for professionals involved in the field of investigating allegations in foster care and supporting everyone involved in the process.

**This toolkit will:**

- Introduce the 5 Ps Model of allegations practice.
- Explore opportunities to reframe how we view allegations and improve preparation of prospective and approved foster carers.
- Provide advice and practice guidance to improve professional risk assessment and responses following an allegation.
- Improve clarity around what constitutes an allegation, concern or complaint.
- Improve clarity around terminology and outcomes.
- Offer guidance on how to improve placement stability as safely as possible and reduce the likelihood of children being removed from their home.
- Offer guidance to reduce the likelihood of foster carers resigning due to their experiences through developing improved understanding of the processes and outlining options for support.



This toolkit is intended to provide best practice guidance to support all those involved across the spectrum of the fostering journey, from recruitment onwards. It provides templates and tools for practitioners and will focus on the aspects of allegations practice where foster carers and practitioners have shared that there is the greatest need for improvement.

This toolkit is part of a programme of work to provide better support for the fostering sector in managing allegations in an effort to provide better outcomes for children and foster carers. It is best read alongside its companion *Allegations, concerns, and complaints: information for foster carers and those who support them* and The Fostering Network’s publication on Protective Care for fostering families.





# Impact: Children and foster carers

## The importance of listening to children

This guide is intended for professionals and written with children's best interests at its heart. Across the UK foster carers are responsible for looking after some of the most vulnerable children in society. We know that adverse childhood experiences and often being subject to 'significant harm' by a trusted adult have serious long-term consequences for children. Whilst the evidence is that most foster carers offer safe, loving care, it is important for professionals to recognise that abuse may occur in any form of care, and not to assume that children are safe<sup>1</sup>. Learning from Serious Case Reviews tells us that a child may be subject to abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm by any individual in any setting and all children should be cared for and protected from harm.

The child's welfare and the importance of their wishes and feelings are paramount in safeguarding and enshrined in our safeguarding legislation, most notably the Children Act 1989. Allied to this is one of the most important messages in this toolkit: that **all children should be listened to when they tell us their experiences**, and we should act on the information we receive.

Serious Case Reviews, Practice, Learning and Case Management Reviews have often highlighted the difficulties and inadequacies around establishing the wishes and feelings of children and young people. Both the Ofsted Thematic Review of Serious Case Reviews (2014) and Clever and Rose in their thematic review of case reviews concerning foster carers, adopters and special guardians 2007-2019, highlight that the voices of young people 'have not been sufficiently heard'.

It is widely believed that children who have experienced early trauma may be more likely to report allegations of abuse by foster carers due to difficulties understanding the actions of others or interpreting behaviour differently. While it is important for practitioners to be aware of the context and impact of trauma on young people, this must never be assumed as an explanation of the behaviour of adults caring for them. Professionals who are responsible for the protection of children have a duty to safeguard children whatever their experiences or the setting they are placed in and should always conduct a risk assessment in accordance with legal responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Clever and Rose (2020) *Safeguarding children living with foster carers, adopters, and special guardians: Learning from Case Reviews 2007-2019*

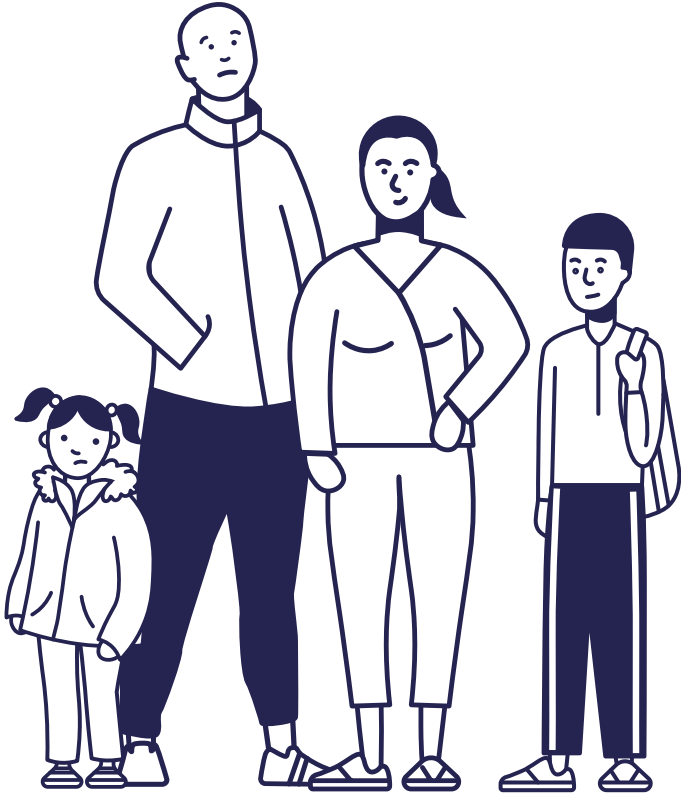




The prevalence of allegation investigations against foster carers is rising and so is the likelihood of children being moved as a result.

This guide explores alternative approaches and makes recommendations to improve stability for children. It also explores improving opportunity to ensure communication with children and ensuring that they never feel the burden of responsibility, blame or fault following an allegation.

*“I was taken from my foster family, no one told me why and I was moved to another city without even packing my own bags. When I asked to go home, they said there had been an allegation made by another child. I loved my foster mam, but I never saw her again, I just wanted to go home to her, and no one would listen to me.”*  
Sam aged 14<sup>2</sup>



2 Consultation with young people, 2022-2024

## Prevalence and the experience of foster carers

Over three-fifths of children and young people in care in the UK are living in foster care.<sup>3</sup> Foster carers work largely unsupervised within their homes with children, providing a high level of care in most circumstances. They provide a vital service for society by supporting children when the state has concluded that they are unable to live at home with parents.

While the safety of children and young people must always be the priority, many foster carers have reported that, even when an allegation has been unfounded, the investigation impacted them negatively. An allegation can bring a foster carer's reputation and integrity into question, and many foster carers highlight feelings of distress linked to being presumed guilty and the damaging effects on their confidence around caring for children in the future.

"We felt totally unbelieved and isolated.... After 22 years we very nearly resigned over it.... Having asked for more support and not receiving it."<sup>4</sup>

"Fully understand the need to investigate any allegation and happy to work with those involved. However, the process did make us question our role as foster carers, particularly the impact on current employment etc. Did not feel supported, merely left waiting for a decision."<sup>5</sup>

"The process needs to be clear and communicated. It's a mess" <sup>6</sup>

"It was a nightmare from start to finish. I had no contact from my supervising social worker and no explanation as to why"<sup>7</sup>

Foster carers also report feeling unsupported by services and professionals who have formerly been in place to support them and the children in their care. They highlight a lack of practical, emotional and financial support for themselves and their families.

Within this guidance we will share and explore opportunities to improve the experience and outcomes for children and foster carers before, during and after an allegation occurs in a fostering family setting.

3 Combined stats from: Children looked after in England including adoptions (2023) Department for Education. [Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2022-23](#) (2023), Department of Health. Scottish Government, [Children's Social Work Statistics 2022-23 – Looked After Children](#) (2023), Scottish Government. Stats Wales, Children looked after by local authorities, by age and gender, at [31 March](#) (2024) Welsh Government. Actual figure is 68.4%. 2023) Department for Education. [Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2022-23](#) (2023), Department of Health. Scottish Government, [Children's Social Work Statistics 2022-23 – Looked After Children](#) (2023), Scottish Government. Stats Wales, Children looked after by local authorities, by age and gender, at [31 March](#) (2024) Welsh Government. Actual figure is 68.4%.

4 Foster Carer, State of the Nations' report 2024

5 Foster Carer, State of the Nations' report 2024

6 Social Worker, State of the Nations' report 2024

7 Additional analysis from State of the Nation Foster Care 2021 in 'The worst day of my life': Foster carers' experiences of allegations - Louisa M Roberts, Alyson Rees, Daisy Elliott, Sophie Wood, 2024





# Complaint, concern or allegation?

Improving practice in this area starts with improving clarity in respect of what constitutes an allegation, a concern or complaint. Having a clear understanding of what constitutes each of these, supports better safeguarding practice, improves placement stability, and

supports the retention of foster carers. Evidence from practice highlights that allegations, concerns and complaints are part of a continuum of professional concern and it is important to consider the history and holistic picture when conducting an assessment.

The table below defines key factors in relation to each. (Table 1)

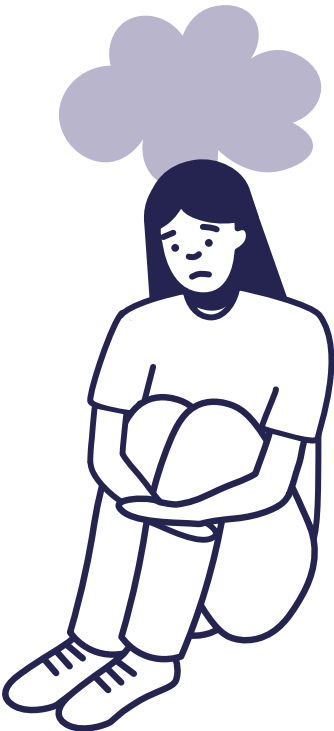
	What is this?
Complaint	<p>A complaint can be defined as <i>An expression of dissatisfaction provided verbally or in writing. It could be an objection to something that is considered unfair, unacceptable or not meeting the standards expected.</i></p> <p>In fostering complaints can be about anything and everything. They should be considered as opportunities to learn, explore different perspectives and consider if improvements can be made. A complaint may be investigated and resolved or could identify the need to move to investigation under practice concerns.</p>
Concern	<p>In fostering when concerns are raised in respect of a foster carers practice they are sometimes referred to as 'care standards' or 'quality of care' concerns. They can be directly related to the quality of the care provided to a child/children. Or they can sometimes be raised if there are concerns in respect of a foster carers ability to meet the regulatory requirements expected of approved foster carers.</p> <p>Concerns are different to allegations because they are not deemed to meet the criteria for safeguarding procedures to apply.</p>
Allegation	<p>An allegation under safeguarding procedures is defined below <i>Where it is alleged that a person who works with children<sup>8</sup> has</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>behaved in a way that has harmed or may harm a child<sup>9</sup></i></li><li><i>committed a criminal offence against a child or that has a direct impact on the <u>child</u></i></li><li><i>behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children</i></li></ul> <p>The information reported must meet the clearly defined threshold above in order to be deemed an 'allegation' in respect of safeguarding.</p>

8 In Wales safeguarding procedures apply equally to children and adults at risk  
9 In Scotland definitions are broadened to include the assertion that a foster carer or member of the fostering household has acted in a way that may have caused a child distress not leading to significant harm.



# Investigation process

Across the UK there are small differences in legislation and the interpretation of this legislation in respect of allegations against foster carers. This new guidance is designed to supplement and work in harmony with the relevant legislation and guidance in each country, we have included a table to outline relevant legislation and guidance in the appendix. This publication should not be viewed in isolation from relevant safeguarding legislation and guidance. Every fostering service should have a policy and process that sets out how allegations, concerns and complaints are investigated. This publication should be utilised to support the design and regular review of local policy and procedure in services, with the aim to improve outcomes for everyone involved in the allegations process. If your policy is not aligned to updated best practice, we would recommend it is reviewed and any changes implemented on a holistic basis.



# Outcomes

During the research and practice review undertaken in the scoping of this publication it became clear that the final *outcome* following an investigation process being undertaken was not always clear. The terms used often differed and the understanding of the terms differed to a greater extent. There was a common misunderstanding in the interpretation of the term unsubstantiated and this was often incorrectly used interchangeably with unfounded. Across the UK some differences remain in respect of this aspect of practice, this causes confusion and uncertainty for fostering families and those who support them.

In this publication we follow the consistent outcome terms below and provide clarity on their interpretation.

**Substantiated:** This means there is evidence that the allegation has been **proven**.

**Unsubstantiated:** This means there is not enough evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. It does not imply guilt or innocence but is reflective of an **inconclusive** outcome.

**Unfounded:** This means there is evidence to **disprove** the allegation.

We are aware that the terms malicious or false may have been used in the past and therefore make reference to this. It is no longer considered best practice to use this term.

**Malicious<sup>10</sup>:** This means the allegation is entirely false and there is clear evidence to prove that there has been a deliberate act to deceive.

The outcome of an investigation into an allegation does not constitute the end of the process for foster carers. Whilst the outcome is important to conclude the safeguarding process and inform the next stage, the assessment of ability to meet the regulations to foster must be undertaken separately, in line with the foster carer review process.

**A substantiated allegation should not automatically result in termination of approval, in the same way that an unfounded allegation should not result in automatic continuation of approval. The assessment of continued approval must be undertaken separately and robustly.**

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<sup>10</sup> Following the Child Safeguarding Practice Review into the murder of Star Hobson, the review panel concluded that the use of the term malicious 'has many attendant risks and (we) would therefore discourage its usage as a professional conclusion.'



Often in cases of substantiated allegations, where the foster carer agrees that they acted in a way that they regret and wishes to develop and prevent this from happening again, a safety plan and increased monitoring by the service can ensure that sufficient steps are taken to safeguard against future harm. This is particularly important for children who wish to remain in the care of the foster family and may have been living with them for many years.

Unfounded outcomes may prove that the allegation did not occur, however wider factors such as the events leading up to the allegation and an assessment of the foster carers wellbeing and ability to continue to foster following the allegation may identify learning and development opportunities or other factors for the assessing social worker to consider.

Unsubstantiated allegations are often considered the most difficult outcome to assess in respect of continuation of approval as a foster carer. It is also the

most common outcome recorded in respect of allegations against foster carers. When a team of senior multi-disciplinary professionals have been unable to ascertain if an allegation did or did not occur based on the evidence, assessment and analysis made by those involved in the case it can create very challenging circumstances for both foster carer and fostering service. It falls to the fostering service to assess continued approval and to make recommendations to the fostering panel from a starting position of great uncertainty.

**In line with current safeguarding legislation, when there is insufficient evidence to disprove the allegation, the only way to proceed in respect of fostering is to work on the basis as if it occurred. The assessment of continued approval, support, supervision and any recommendations for continued professional development should be based on the possibility that the allegation did occur, to take any other approach would be to go against the decision of the senior professional's outcome meeting and would be unlawful.**

# Reframing allegations

## The 5 Ps Model

The heart of this toolkit is the 5 Ps: Prepare, Prevent, Proportionate, Plan and Protect. These are core recommendations that support best practice in respect of allegations in foster care. These five areas summarise and distil the opportunity to 'reframe' allegations.

### Prepare

Prepare foster carers for the allegations process, use factual, local, evidence-based information.

### Plan

Plan for everyone's needs, have a foster family plan, child's plan and allegation plan.

### Prevent

Prevent children from experiencing unplanned moves, when it is safe to do so and prevent children from feeling blame or responsibility.

### Proportionate

Proportionate well-informed decision making and risk assessment for all, with all.

### Protection

Protection when an allegation does occur. Specialist legal advice, financial protection and support should be afforded to all foster carers.



# Prepare

Fear of the unknown is widely reported by applicants and foster carers as one of the primary issues to overcome in respect of allegations. Foster carers report that conversations about allegations are few and far between and when they do take place it is presented as something to be fearful of and something they should try to ‘protect’ themselves from.



Can a foster carer *protect* themselves from an allegation?’ Consider the impact on children and young people of the adult protection narrative and whether there are unintended consequences of implementing this protection.

Whilst it is possible for foster carers to implement mechanisms to ‘protect’ themselves, to do this has a significant impact on family life and can have unintended consequences for children. To introduce protective measures for adults, foster carers need to implement new behaviours such as reducing or restricting physical contact; have two adults always present to ensure a witness to their activity; and as an extreme measure, introduce cameras into fostering environments. This does not facilitate healthy, usual family life and it is not child centred.

Instead, we should consider that the only way for anyone to protect themselves is to not cause significant harm to a child or young person.

Maintaining an open, honest and transparent relationship with children, families and professionals is the greatest protective factor for foster carers.

Advising foster carers to ‘protect themselves’, although a well-established narrative and practice norm, is not conducive to child centred practice. With limited research in this area, it is also not possible to link the use of protective measures with a reduction in the likelihood of receiving an allegation. We recommend that this is replaced with ‘prepare themselves’ and that services should accept this duty to prepare as a critical part of the process.

Preparation can take many forms, it should start by **talking honestly** about allegations in a positive, child centred way. These conversations need to take place as **early in the fostering journey** as possible. Services should prepare guidance or invest in products such as the Fostering Network’s Allegations, concerns and complaints Signpost to provide information to start this preparation. Staff in the fostering team should be well versed in answering questions in respect of allegations, including knowledge of local data to **provide facts** and give an element of perspective to the conversation. If applicants express fear of an allegation, it is far better to acknowledge this fear and provide knowledge to enable an





informed decision than to downplay the likelihood of allegations and push this conversation to a later stage.

Knowing the number of foster carers who experienced an allegation during the year as a percentage of the total number of households in a service can help applicants to understand the likelihood and gain perspective during these early conversations.

The preparation should continue during the **initial training**. Services should ensure robust learning opportunities for new applicants to foster, and any training courses made available should cover the subject area of allegations. Extensive updates have been undertaken to both The Skills to Foster® and The Fostering Network’s Complaints, Standards of Care and Allegations training offer with this good practice guide and toolkit in mind.

The **assessment stage** provides a greater opportunity to discuss allegations in a private and safe environment. The focus should remain on ways to build a sense of feeling

prepared should one occur. Key areas to cover include, understanding the process, sharing as many examples as possible to build awareness. How to deal with the significant levels of uncertainty that are inevitable once the process kicks in and building trust in the process. Support mechanisms that the applicant can call upon, who they can talk to and what restrictions they might need to follow. What they can expect from their fostering service, their supervising social worker, the children’s social workers, and the wider interactions with professionals.

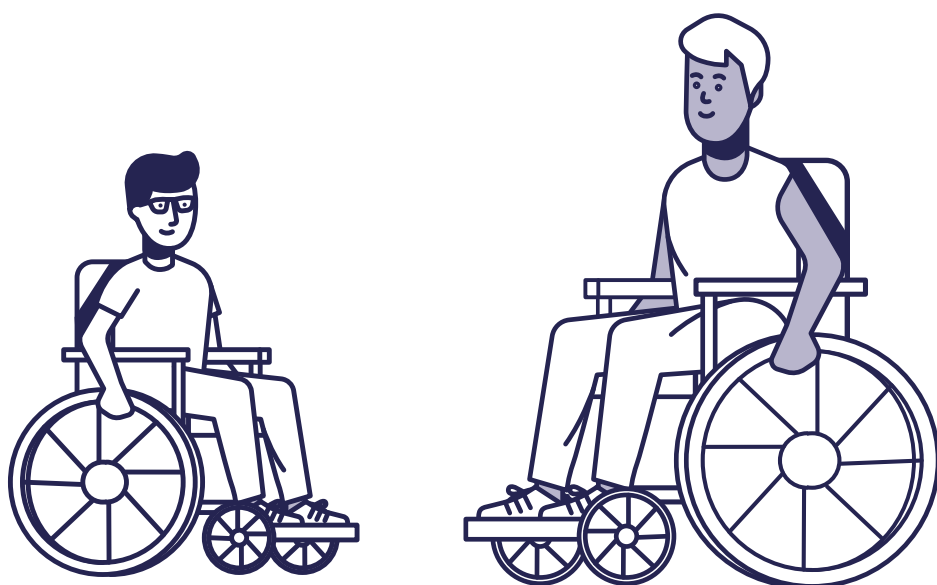
Following approval every service should ensure a robust **induction period**, and this is a further opportunity to refresh and review the foster carers understanding and preparation for a potential allegation. Many services introduce **peer support** at this stage, introducing newly approved foster carers to an experienced ‘buddy’ or ‘mentor’. This can prove to be an essential relationship and training for peer mentors should be reviewed to ensure that it aligned to the reframing allegations approach.

### Learning and development

opportunities provide continuous opportunity to build on the foundation of feeling prepared for an allegation. The first few weeks and months following approval can be the greatest learning curve for foster carers. Services should ensure that they review their training offer to ensure that it aligns to the reframing allegations approach and is responsive to the needs of foster carers. Too many foster carers experience an allegation before they have had the opportunity to attend any

specific training on understanding the allegations process. Services should ensure that foster carers can access this essential learning as soon as possible in their journey and regular opportunity to refresh their knowledge base of the allegations process. The Fostering Network makes a robust training offer to support the implementation of this toolkit at an affordable cost to services. Introductory training for foster carers is also available on our Learning Management System.

**To summarise, preparation in respect of allegations should start early, with honest, factual conversations during initial enquiry, assessment and induction. Learning and development and peer support should be available with a focus on normalising terms and process; growing understanding around trauma and why allegations occur; and building the understanding of the importance of responding in a child centred way.**



## Prepare checklist



### Initial enquiry stage phone call/contact

**Is this call answered by an experienced Supervising Social Worker, confident to share information and answer questions around allegations honestly, with facts and reassurances?**

Real life examples are particularly important at this stage. Applicants are increasingly asking these questions and the answer they receive will inform their decision to proceed.



### Initial home visit

**Are Supervising Social Workers able to make best use of this visit as an opportunity to raise awareness of allegations and provide honest, factual, child centred reassurance in response to any worries?**

In best practice the visit should be undertaken by the same SSW who took the initial call, this enables the critical trusting relationship to grow and prevents applicants from repeating information and questions. If applicants receive different messages, conflicting answers or uncertainty at this point in the relationship building they will lose trust and this impacts on their decision to proceed.



### Know your annual data

**Does every supervising social worker know how many foster carers were subject to an allegation and of these, what were the outcomes – and how many of these carers continued fostering?**

**Do you use team meetings as an opportunity to review and learn from allegations in the service?**

Facts matter, they dispel myths, build trust and provide perspective to balance any fear. Make best use of team meetings to review process, outcomes, explore opportunities to learn and share good practice following allegations.



### Preparation training

**Does your training include factual, honest, child centred information regarding allegations?**

**Does it start to introduce the process and explain how you support foster carers through allegations in your service?**

**Is initial training provided as soon after the home visit as possible and before proceeding to assessment stage?**

Delays at this stage can result in loss of engagement and reduce trust in the service. Initial training should be considered as the opportunity to learn enough information to assist applicants in the decision-making process, it should always be undertaken before any assessment commences. Applicants should be given protected time to attend this training, to reflect on the question 'is fostering right for me/us, and am I/are we right for fostering? \*The New Skills to Foster is designed to ensure that applicants are empowered to answer this critical question.\*



### Question and answer sessions with approved foster carers

**Do you provide opportunity for applicants to talk to approved foster carers to ask questions after the initial training stage?**

**Does this opportunity include a foster carer with experience of the allegation process?**

One of the best ways to facilitate this can be to invite a selection of foster carers with a wide range of experiences to a round table event and facilitate a question-and-answer session.



### Assessment stage

**Are assessments undertaken by the same Supervising Social Worker that applicants have built a trusting relationship with to date?**

**Do assessors ensure the inclusion of a wide range of anonymous case studies, including an example of an allegation experience?**

Ensure the case study is based on the guidance in this toolkit to support applicants to build a picture of what might happen, to help them visualise how they might respond and what they will need to support them through the process. It is important to keep these conversations focused on reality and perspective. Managing uncertainty and maintaining resilience are critical skills required for all foster carers, and this should form a critical part of the assessment process.



Local induction sessions

**Does your local induction process include everything a newly approved foster carer needs to know about fostering with your service?**

Ensure this includes recording and reporting, and asking appropriate questions when discussions are taking place about the possibility of a child or young person coming to stay with a foster carer, with a reminder of how this links with the allegation process and the further training available on these areas of practice.



Peer support/buddy

**Do you match all newly approved foster carers with a peer support buddy, either before panel, or as soon as possible after approval?**

For support and guidance around establishing a robust peer support service contact our team of practice consultants at The Fostering Network.



Continuous development

**Do you create robust continuous learning and development plans, with access to ongoing training in respect of all aspects of the allegations process?**



# Plan

Previous guidance in respect of allegations referred to creating ‘safer caring plans’. We have undertaken a review of this publication and reframed safer caring as Protective Care. We have heard from children and foster carers that often; safer caring was introduced at the very beginning of the fostering journey and created a ‘blanket ban’ approach. It was completed as a checklist of dos and don’ts and led to risk averse practice. This new approach recommends the creation of three plans and weaving these into everyday practice. Planning in this way ensures a person-centred approach is maintained with a holistic view of everyone's needs, vulnerabilities and strengths.

## Fostering family plan

This plan should initially be created during the assessment process to outline family norms and adjustments that the family have agreed to make as part of their transition to a fostering family. The plan should be kept alive, visitors and new family members should be familiar with the plan, and it should form part the discussions at regular supervisory visits. This is a live plan to enable everyone to be responsive to needs.

## Allegations plan

The allegations plan is an opportunity to explore what might work well for the family should an allegation occur. It should capture where they get their best support, who might move in to be a safe adult or where an adult might be able to stay if they were asked to move out. It provides an opportunity to put the family in the mindset of planning for this situation and reflecting on what might need to be in place for them to feel able to get the through the process with a plan.

## Child’s personal plan

This plan should be presented in a child-friendly format and is all about the child’s personal needs, it should cover what they need from their fostering family. This should include their views, reflect what works well for them, what they need from adults in respect of supporting their behaviour, understanding why they might behave in a certain way. This plan should be universally shared with all the adults in the child’s life so that school and home life should feel consistent and safe.

Further guidance in respect of these plans, including templates can be found in Protective Care a NEW approach to safer caring publication 2025.





**Plan checklist**

- ☒ Does your fostering service ensure that every fostering family completes a Protective Care Fostering Family Plan and an Allegations Plan during the assessment process?
- ☒ Are these regularly reviewed, updated and agreed?
- ☒ Does your fostering service request that the child’s social worker completes a Protective Care Childs Personal Plan prior to, or as soon as possible after placement?
- ☒ Is the child’s personal plan regularly reviewed, updated and agreed, at a minimum in line with care planning review meetings?
- ☒ Do you offer regular training for foster carers in respect of Protective Care and meeting the individual needs of children?





# Prevent

Whilst we advise shifting the language from *prevent* to *prepare* in relation to the adults involved in allegations, much more can be done to **prevent children from experiencing unplanned moves and further broken attachments** during the allegations process. Too often children are subject to an unplanned move to another fostering family, either because of sharing an allegation themselves or because of an allegation shared by another child in the household.

Young people, previously subject to allegation procedures, have told us that they would have liked to have been asked for their view before being removed from their foster family home. They did not always understand that this would happen following sharing information with professionals and would have liked to have been consulted.

*'Social workers left me at home for years when I was little and tried really hard to help my mum to be able to care for me, even when things were really bad, like really bad. My foster carer Jane made one mistake, and I was taken away immediately. I had to move school, lost contact with my best friend and I felt like it was all my fault. Nearly a year later they said I could go back to Jane; I had lived with three different foster carers during this time and none of them knew me or loved me like Jane did. Does anyone think about the impact on us when there's an allegation?' Bethany aged 15<sup>11</sup>*

Children and young people would like to know who is thinking about their best interests when an allegation is made against their foster carer. They would like professionals to do more to enable them to stay in their own bedroom, in their own home, to not be asked to move unless it is their choice to do so, or the risks are so high that they must. If moving to another fostering family is the only way to secure safety for the child, they would like to be afforded opportunity to say goodbye to people they care about and to be able to pack and collect their own personal belongings.

<sup>11</sup> Consultation with young people, 2022-2024



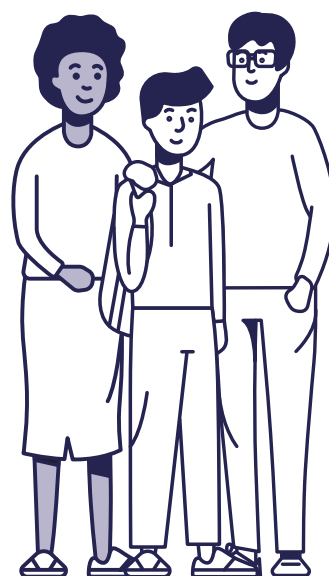
Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, alternative options should be considered as part of the safety planning process following an allegation. These alternatives can include,

- **an identified safe adult moving** into the foster home whilst investigations are carried out, this could be a fellow foster carer or someone from the fostering family support network;
- or the **adult subject to the allegation moving out** of the family home for a temporary period of time.

Both options remove the need for the child to bear the trauma of further disruption and uphold child centred, trauma informed practice. It requires adults to understand the impact of unplanned moves on children and to remove themselves to prevent further impact on the child until investigations are concluded.

Wherever possible, an unplanned move should be avoided. The negative impact of moves and disruption on children in foster care is well documented<sup>12</sup>. As with child protection referrals that occur when children are in the care of birth parents or relatives, responses to allegations in foster care should be proportionate to the perceived/assessed risks.

The decision about whether a child is safe to remain in the foster home should be made carefully, weighing up the negative impact of moving the child against the risk of harm to the child if they stay in the home. Table 3 outlines good practice options for safety planning when children are to remain in a foster home following an allegation. These options can be used together or separately and at various points during the investigation process. It is important to note that the suitability of each option may vary based on individual circumstances and the perceived risk to the child. Additionally, these safety plans will require careful monitoring and regular review to ensure their effectiveness and appropriateness over time. It is essential that any plans are in line with the recommendations from the professional strategy meeting.



<sup>12</sup> AFKA Cymru (2021) *Improving Placement Stability for Children Looked After in Foster Placements*

Best practice approaches for safeguarding children during an investigation (Table 2)

Approach	Safety plan	The person the allegation is against is asked to leave the home.	Support person or member of the extended family moves into the home.
Actions	<p>This plan is drawn up by the social workers, foster carer(s) (and their network if appropriate), child or young person and any other relevant professional. It will set out the actions and requirements that will keep the child safe during the process of investigation.</p> <p>This may include stipulations about who can or cannot visit the home and how the child or young person will be supervised.</p>	<p>This option can be included in the safety plan.</p> <p>The stipulations should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where the person will stay</li> <li>• consideration of ongoing contact</li> <li>• finances available to support this arrangement</li> <li>• likely timescales for the arrangement</li> <li>• support available to the non-resident foster carer and the fostering family</li> <li>• how and when arrangements will be reviewed</li> </ul>	<p>This person will be asked to provide supervision to the care of the child until the investigation is concluded and resolved.</p>
Outcome	The child will remain safely in the foster home, minimising disruption while the investigation is ongoing.	The child will remain safely in the foster home, minimising disruption while the investigation is ongoing.	<p>The child will remain safely in the foster home, minimising disruption while the investigation is ongoing.</p> <p>It also provides the foster carers with practical and emotional support in the home during the investigation.</p>

## Prevent checklist



### Children first

**Has the child or young person been asked what they would like to happen? Can their views be respected and acted upon?**

**If the decision to remove children from the fostering family is the agreed course of action, when will they be told, who will seek their views, what will they be told, will this be temporary arrangement, and can they have contact with the foster carer or wider fostering family?**

**Can enough safety be achieved to enable the child or young person to pack and collect their own belongings?**

**What actions will be taken to prevent a child from feeling that they are to blame? How will any children involved be supported during and after the process. Who will take the lead on this work, what will they do and when will they do it?**



### Support networks

**Does your fostering service include the assessment of a support network as a standard part of the recruitment process?**

**Are approved support networks involved in the creation of the Proactive Care Allegations Plan and aware of the expectations? Are they offered access to training, so they are better placed to be able to support the foster carer and the child?**

**Are the policies and processes in place to support this approach?**

No foster carer should be expected to foster without a robust support network. They should always be assessed in line with local requirements for babysitters/significant adults<sup>13</sup> and can be utilised for regular, ad-hoc, or emergency support to ensure normal family life for children.



### Allegations policy, procedure and training

**Does your allegations policy, procedures and training for foster carers cover the need to remain child focused at the point of crisis, and therefore the possibility of being asked to temporarily leave the fostering family home if required?**

It is critical to highlight the low likelihood of this occurring and any agreed, reasonable costs incurred for taking this action should be fully covered by the fostering service.

<sup>13</sup> A person identified as a significant support and care provider attached to the foster carers approval, usually a member of the foster carers support network.



## Proportionate

This P refers to **proportionate decision making and risk assessment** when managing allegations involving foster carers. Thousands of foster carers and fostering services contact The Fostering Network every year in relation to allegations. Foster carers tell advisors about their situation in great detail and hundreds of foster carers are supported via The Fostering Networks advocacy services (Independent Support & Advice and Mediation) each year. This provides a wide perspective and insight into the spectrum of approaches taken in respect of proportional decision making and risk assessment. Whilst every situation is unique there are some **common factors** which are **inconsistently considered** by services responsible for investigating allegations. These factors can be summarised in three areas.

### ■ Assessment and annual review

Every approved foster carer has been subject to extensive, rigorous, statutory assessment to meet the regulatory requirements to foster. This assessment process is live and continuous, those who have led on this and hold overall responsibility should form a significant part of the risk assessment process.

**Supervising social workers, annual review chairs, fostering service managers and the extensive information that they hold on the foster carers should form part of the risk assessment process.**

### ■ Continuous professional contact

A variety of professionals have regular interaction with fostering families, they build professional, accountable relationships, foster carers do not practice in isolation and records of their practice are made daily.

**These professionals and any records held should form a significant part of the risk assessment process.**

### ■ Team Around the Child

Foster carers are equal members of the team. Whilst the term professional is not universally endorsed across the sector, foster carers are members of the team and should be treated as such in all circumstances. **Safeguarding procedures should be applied to foster carers in the same way that they are applied to teachers, social workers, nurses and other staff in positions of trust.**

■ The extent to which the three factors above are considered during the allegations process as it applies to approved foster carers appears to vary a great deal. This results in significant variation in the experience for the child and the foster carer.







*'Before I fostered, I was a teacher for 20 years. I had attended extensive safeguarding training and I understood that just merely being qualified as a teacher or being approved as a foster carer didn't automatically mean that you were a safe adult. I remember being taught that a DBS check is only as good as the day it is issued! However, when an allegation was made against me I did expect that someone would have gone to my file and reviewed the robust and in-depth process that I went through; my last annual review; last week's supervision session; spoken to the Health Visitor, who practically lived in my house, she made so many visits for the little ones with their complex needs; spoken to the school, I was there everyday, so many staff had observed my approach and interaction with the children; collected my daily records to read about the events of the day in question. I didn't want to stop the investigation from happening, but I wanted people to consider all of the information available.'*

*Maria, retired teacher and foster carer.<sup>14</sup>*

## Introducing the Threshold Meeting

Where there is a child protection concern, or an allegation is made that suggests a child is at risk of harm from a foster carer (person in a position of trust) the matter should be referred to a safeguarding lead within the local authority. The Local Authority Designated Officer (England), the Designated Officer Safeguarding (Wales), Designated Officer (Northern Ireland) or Designated Manager (Scotland) will play a key role in leading child centred risk assessment,

consulting with stakeholders, providing advice to employers and ensuring that the allegation against a foster carer is rigorously and fairly evaluated. It is best practice to ensure that all of the relevant information is considered at this initial point as part of the **threshold meeting**<sup>15</sup>. Thorough assessment of the information at this stage can ensure a proportionate approach is taken and can result in improved outcomes for children and foster carers if safety planning and risk assessment is put to best use.

It may be difficult at first to determine whether the information received meets the threshold for an allegation investigation or is a serious concern or complaint. The initial consultation with the safeguarding lead, to determine the most appropriate, proportionate and child centred action should be undertaken as soon as possible. It is essential that the child's social worker, the fostering social worker and their respective managers are included in this consultation. It is considered good practice to include the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in these early discussions as they often have a good overview of the child's history and can offer invaluable insight and contribution to decision making. Consider seeking the views of other significant professionals who are involved and could offer valuable insight. If the decision is that the matter presented is not a complaint, a standard of care concern but a child protection matter, a professional strategy meeting will be convened and chaired by the safeguarding lead to determine the appropriateness of a child protection investigation and to plan the process.

<sup>14</sup> Consultation with foster carers, 2022-2024

<sup>15</sup> See Meetings, Roles and Responsibilities table



**Safeguarding procedures apply to every member of the team around the child, a foster carer’s experience should be comparable to that of the fostering team manager.**

**Experience of a fostering team manager**

When an allegation is received in respect of a professional, such as a teacher, social worker or nurse, their position is respected, the strictest confidentiality and need to know basis is observed, they may be asked not to attend their workplace, but they will usually always receive full pay and will be treated with dignity and respect. The investigation is usually prioritised, support services will be offered throughout via occupational health or HR wellbeing services, they may be offered counselling to support them following the process. They will be supported to return to work, or a decision regarding their continued suitability will be made by an independent body with whom they hold professional registration.

**Experience of a foster carer**

The same experience is rarely shared by foster carers subject to an allegation. Foster carer payments often cease with immediate effect, support is frequently withdrawn or is not adequate. The provision of independent support is not always funded or shared as a right. Many people may be made aware of the allegation including staff, other foster carers and parents. Whilst attempts can be made to limit this information sharing, it is often unavoidable, a by-product of crisis moves for children and alternative placement searches. Foster carers are rarely able to access occupational health, HR wellbeing services or counselling during or after the process. There is currently no independent registration body for foster carers and therefore continued suitability to practice will be made without independent oversight.





Proportionate checklist



Child and carer’s chronology/relevant information for initial decision making

**Does your service ensure that all the relevant information regarding the fostering household is included in early decision making to inform the risk assessment and safety planning?**

It can be helpful to have a proforma or template for supervising social workers to draw down the information that is required, quickly and with ease. An example is included in the appendix.

**Are all relevant staff included in the threshold meeting to determine the initial decision making, risk assessment and safety planning?**

**Is everyone involved in this decision making, skilled, experienced and clearly able to define if this a concern, complaint or allegation?**

Relevant staff will vary but we would recommend that this group is as wide as possible to bring everyone together with relevant insight at this critical point.

**Are foster carers daily records accessed and at what point?**



Professional experience

**Does your service treat foster carers subject to an allegation in the same way as the fostering team manager or the children's social worker should they be subject to an allegation?**

This question is likely to evoke a response of ‘of course they do’, safeguarding procedures are regulatory and apply to everyone who works with children in a position of trust, equally. The key here is to test if this is the reality in practice.





# Protection

The fifth and final P refers to the **legal and financial protections that all services can and should put in place for foster carers.** These protections enable foster carers to feel confident that should an allegation occur they are not only prepared but know that they can access **specialist legal advice and protection** without personal cost or delay. The Fostering Network is the leading provider of this insurance cover, and we believe that it should be considered the most basic requirement for every service to provide this to their fostering families. Unfortunately, many fostering households are asked to undertake their fostering duties without this protection being provided by their service. Some foster carers contact us directly to purchase this insurance and it is positive that their fostering services advises them to take this action. However, it should not fall to foster carers, acting on behalf of the state and without access to the many wider employee benefits, to fund their own legal protection.

- This should also extend to the provision of good quality, restorative and solution focused independent support, advocacy and mediation. Even when extensive preparation has been afforded to foster carers, the moment the allegation process is initiated an emotional response will naturally come before a rational response. Fostering families should be provided with significant and intensive levels of support. This is when supervising social workers should step up and support the fostering family as much as possible. The foster carers will need this more than ever before. Fostering families may also benefit from an independent person to support them at this time and access and funding for this should be available and form part of the standard protection available to every fostering family.
- Financially, the impact of an allegation, combined with outdated practices in respect of payments to foster carers, can be catastrophic for many families. Every approved fostering family should be able to experience a basic level of financial security. The evidence shows that many more people could foster if financial stability could be achieved as part of the role. We recommend that as a minimum standard, a fee payment should be paid 52 weeks per year to every approved fostering family and this payment should continue when a foster carer is subject to an allegation and throughout the investigation process<sup>16</sup>.

16 The Fostering Network (2024) *Out of Pocket – Fairer Fees for Foster Carers*





## Protection checklist

- ☒ Does your fostering service secure and fund membership with 24 hour, 365, legal protection for every fostering family?
- ☒ Does your fostering Service have an up-to-date protocol for the management of allegations and is it easily accessible for fostering households and their support networks?
- ☒ Does your fostering service have systems in place to ensure that staff can be available to support their foster carers should an allegation occur?
- ☒ Does your fostering service have good quality out of hours support available should an allegation occur outside of usual working hours?
- ☒ Do you provide peer support and maintain an up-to-date list of foster carers available to support others in times of crisis?
- ☒ Do supervising social workers understand their role and responsibilities when a foster carer is subject to allegation procedures and the importance of increasing support and contact with the family?
- ☒ Does your payment policy for foster carers provide financial stability and guarantee a basic level of continued fee through an allegation process?
- ☒ Does your fostering service have a contract or spot purchase agreement with a recognised agency to provide high quality independent, restorative advocacy and mediation during the allegation process?



Too many foster carers experience their supervising social worker stepping away from them during an allegation. This can leave them feeling extremely vulnerable and should be avoided wherever possible. Supervising social workers must step into the support space during an allegation with great skill. Whilst the nature of the allegation may not be free to share and many of the foster carer's questions cannot be answered, the person who they know, and trust should be by their side. Explaining the process, helping foster carers to understand why information cannot be shared at this stage and how this facilitates a thorough investigation is crucial for foster carers at a time of great vulnerability and uncertainty. In the next section we will explore what support can and should look like for foster carers.





**Supporting foster carers during safeguarding investigations**

Many foster carers report feeling unsupported and undervalued by social workers during allegation investigations. Once an allegation has been made, foster carers, often despite lengthy and excellent records, report feeling as though they are presumed guilty, leading to a sense of being isolated from the team around the child. Preparing foster carers to better understand the safeguarding process and therefore understand why listening to children can lead to a feeling of presumed guilt for adults can go some way to support rationalising these feelings. It is also vital that there is increased support for foster carers during the investigation process, this is the time for fostering staff to increase their interaction and levels of support. Aside from the personal and financial costs experienced by many foster carers, the experience of an allegation investigation can lead foster carers to consider leaving the profession or failing to recommend fostering to someone considering it. At a time when services across the UK are experiencing significant challenges in respect of placement sufficiency and recruiting foster carers, the retention of experienced carers (where appropriate and safe) should be a priority for all fostering services.

Whilst it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to share information with the foster carer about the investigation and actions that will be taken as part of the safeguarding process. The foster carer's supervising social worker should continue to support and visit foster carers under investigation despite their restrictions on sharing information. There should be clear agreement in the meetings that take place in relation to the investigation regarding what information can be shared and when. A key skill of the supervising social worker is balancing the level of support and communication required without withdrawing from the foster family. Support can take many forms, having trusting, pre-existing relationships in these situations can make a significant difference for fostering families and children. Everyone should be working towards maintaining stability and the best outcome for the child, relationships and support enable this outcome.

Independent support should be offered to all foster carers who are going through the process of investigation following an allegation. It is best practice to make this available to all foster carers and statutory guidance in England states that independent support should be provided by fostering services.

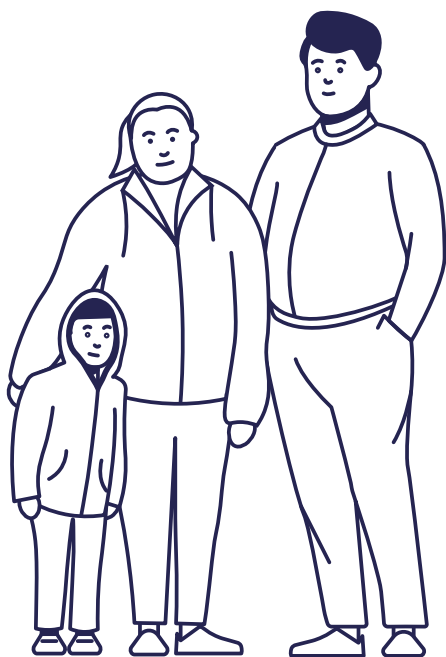




## Timescales

Timescales for the completion of investigations are a particular source of concern and worry. Many foster carers report that timescales are not adhered to, and this can have a significant impact on the foster carer and their family, including children in the home. In England, Ofsted found that almost half of all allegations (46.5%) in 2023-2024 were resolved within 21 working days, but over a quarter (27%) took over fifty working days. The Fostering Network's State of the Nation's 2024 survey found that the most common duration of allegations investigations across the UK was up to one month (33%), and that,

concerningly, one in six respondents (17%) said their latest investigation took six months to one year, and one in ten said the investigation took over a year<sup>17</sup>. There are no timescales set out in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, other than the general principle of timeliness. Many factors can impact the length of time an investigation takes, but it is important to balance the need for a robust and considered investigation with the impact on the child, the foster carer and the fostering family. Factors such as a police investigation or where there is more than one local authority involved can be a source of frustration but are out of the control of the individuals coordinating the enquiries. When the investigation is taking longer than anticipated, it is important to ensure that the foster carer is kept up to date. In the next section we will look in more detail at communication and the importance of information sharing across a range of stakeholders including children and young people.



17 Ellis, S. and Williams, N. (2025) *State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024*, The Fostering Network



Summary of best practice for supporting foster carers during the allegation process (Table 3)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fostering managers should ensure that the workforce is suitably trained and skilled to balance the communication and support requirements of responding to allegations.</li><li>• Fostering managers should ensure that every fostering family has a protective care family plan and allegations plan. Copies should be stored on the foster carers file.</li><li>• Fostering services should ensure their procedures for managing allegations set out expectations in terms of support for foster carers. This should include provisions for financial, practical and emotional support.</li><li>• Fostering services should ensure that sufficient financial support is provided if foster carers are asked to work with a safety plan or leave the fostering home at a financial cost.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Risk assessments concerning children's placement stability and safety considerations should be clearly documented, authorised by senior managers and copies given to the Foster Carers.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fostering services should ensure that all foster carers under investigation for safeguarding concerns are offered independent support from a suitable provider such as The Fostering Network.</li><li>• Support for foster carers should consider the full range of impacts including employment (HR), legal, and mental health support.</li><li>• Good communication with foster carers throughout the process is essential, particularly where investigations may take longer than expected.</li><li>• Fostering services should consider the support needs of foster carers on an individual basis and consider increasing contact or visits by the Supervising Social Worker.</li><li>• Practitioners should clarify if counselling services are available to foster carers during the process and in its aftermath.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The foster carer's own support network can be the most valuable source of support at this time. The family allegations plan should provide full details and practitioners must discuss the support available to a foster carer from family, friends, and other foster carers and the confidentiality implications of sharing information.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practitioners should ensure that foster carers receive sufficient preparation training and post approval training on the management of concerns, complaints, allegations and protective care.</li></ul>



# Importance of communication

Communication at all levels is an essential component of safeguarding children. Case reviews across the UK emphasise the importance of information sharing and collaboration between agencies and professionals. It is also essential to create an environment where children and young people are confident to ask for help if they need it, and are provided with sensitive, age appropriate and clear information about what is happening, to minimise the negative impact on them.

The effective investigation of allegations against foster carers requires clear communication between a range of individuals at different times and in different ways. During the investigation, several meetings will take place (see Table 5) that set out the actions required by professionals and how communication with foster carers and other parties should be managed.

Communication about these meetings will depend on the individual circumstances of the case but, in most cases, an individual who is the subject of an allegation should be told that a strategy discussion has taken place on the same day as it occurs. However, they should not be provided with details of the investigation at this stage, if doing so would impact on the investigation or potentially increase the risk of harm to a child.

It is considered best practice for foster carers to be informed of the strategy discussion and relevant information jointly by the fostering manager/ supervising social worker and the safeguarding social worker/social worker for the child<sup>18</sup>.

The verbal notification should be followed up in writing. The letter (or email) should explain the investigation process and expected timescales; the support to be provided to the foster carer; sources of independent advice, and any financial arrangements to be made. The foster carer should also be informed that they will not be able to foster more children until the outcome of the investigation.

<sup>18</sup> Fostering Network 'Allegations, Concerns and Complaints for Foster Carers and those who support them.'



The supervising social worker will play a key role in keeping the foster carer updated on the progress of the investigation and actions that are agreed at the professional strategy meeting. One of the key challenges for supervising social workers is the conflict they experience in providing a robust, objective assessment of the situation while also providing support to potentially very distressed foster carers. The fostering service should ensure that their safeguarding policy, including the management of allegations against foster carers, is available to all foster carers and sets out the role of the supervising social worker in any child protection investigation. This should include:

- **The role of the supervising social worker in the investigation.**
- **The information they will and will not be able to share with the foster carer.**
- **The support that they can offer the foster carer.**
- **The statutory requirements of the supervising social worker and the safeguarding social worker during the investigation.**
- **The foster carer’s legal and procedural rights.**
- **Where the foster carer can go for additional, independent support.**

Ideally, this information should be shared verbally and in writing by the supervising social worker at the start of the investigation, to help the foster carer understand their role, and to help maintain an effective working relationship between them.





# Meetings, roles and responsibilities

A number of discussions and meetings are required during the investigation process and are set out in legislation. The table below sets out proposals for meetings that support best practice both as part of the investigative process and resolving and planning for the future.

Meetings (Table 4)

Threshold meeting	
Who convenes and chairs?	The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) OR relevant senior person with responsibility for safeguarding.
Who is involved?	Child's social worker and manager, supervising social worker and fostering team manager  Independent reviewing officer  Others deemed relevant by the safeguarding lead, including members of the team around the child who have valuable information and context to share.
Purpose and agenda	<b>Purpose:</b> to determine if a Professional Strategy discussion is required, or if the information should be investigated as a concern or complaint.  This meeting should be recorded, and actions should be monitored and appropriately stored on the child and foster carers records.  It is the responsibility of the Designated Officer for Safeguarding or LADO to confirm if the threshold is met for a Professional Strategy Discussion, and to proceed to this stage if required.
Timescales	As soon as information that could be considered to constitute an allegation/concern/complaint is received.





Professional strategy discussion (PSD)	
Who convenes and chairs?	The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). OR relevant senior person with responsibility for safeguarding.
Who is involved?	<p>The police</p> <p>Childs social worker and manager</p> <p>Supervising social worker and fostering team manager</p> <p>Any other appropriate agencies</p> <p>*Consideration should be given to informing respective inspectorates eg., Ofsted and the Care Inspectorate Wales and any relevant professional bodies</p>
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b></p> <p>To review the information reported with a relevant member of police staff and consider if the threshold has been met for progression to a professional strategy meeting.</p> <p><b>Agenda to consider:</b></p> <p>Identification of any other activities (paid or voluntary) or caring responsibilities that the subject of the allegation has outside of their fostering role.</p> <p>Consideration of urgent or interim safeguards to protect children whilst further enquiries are made.</p> <p>Decision about what information can be shared with the subject of the allegation, the child and their parents</p> <p>Decisions about employer involvement with the process</p> <p>Review adequacy of safeguards in place for other children in the household.</p> <p>Agree any further actions needed prior to the Professional Strategy Meeting.</p> <p>Decide whether immediate briefings to senior management are required.</p>
Timescales	As soon as possible following the threshold meeting when threshold has been met for initial joint discussion.





Safety planning meeting	
Who convenes and chairs?	The team manager of the child's social worker.
Who is involved?	Fostering manager Supervising social worker Child's social worker Any other relevant professional
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b> To plan any actions identified by the professional Strategy discussion or PSM that would require changes to the care arrangements for the child, <b>noting that moving the child from the foster home is the last resort.</b></p> <p><b>Agenda to consider:</b></p> <p>Plans to move the subject of the allegation out of the home.</p> <p>Plans to arrange for supervision of the subject of the allegation whilst both the subject and the child remain in the home.</p> <p>A change of foster home for the child/ren.</p> <p>Arrangements for communication with children about the change to their care arrangements.</p> <p>Arrangements for communication with carers about the change to arrangements to care for the child/ren.</p> <p>* This meeting is considered best practice in ensuring that plans identified as being necessary by the Professional Strategy Meeting or Discussion are implemented in a way that is child centred and respectful of foster carers</p>
Timescales	Following recommendation by PSD or PSM.  Prior to any action to change the care arrangements for he child/ren in the home.





Professional strategy meeting (PSM)	
Who convenes and chairs?	The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) OR relevant senior person with responsibility for safeguarding.
Who is involved?	<div>Designated safeguarding Officer (Chairperson)</div> <div>Police</div> <div>Child’s social worker</div> <div>Child’s team manager</div> <div>Independent reviewing officer for the child</div> <div>Supervising social worker</div> <div>Fostering manager</div> <div>Health representative (safeguarding lead for CLA health)</div> <div>Education/ early years representative (teacher, head teacher, education safeguarding lead</div> <div>Representative from the relevant care inspectorate. Ofsted, Care Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Scotland and The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in Northern Ireland)</div> <div>Legal representative for the local authority</div> <div>Employer of the foster carer (if their employment involves working with children or vulnerable adults.)</div> <div>Human resources or personnel representative</div> <div>* The Chair will consider representation at the meeting and may invite other individuals as appropriate.</div>







Professional strategy meeting (PSM) continued	
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b> ensure proper coordination of child protection, criminal and employment procedures.</p> <p><b>Agenda to consider:</b> Share all relevant information about the allegation.</p> <p>Consider what action may be needed to protect the child at risk.</p> <p>Consider the likelihood of harm to other children within the household or with whom the subject of the allegation has contact with and agree any actions that are required.</p> <p>Consider and evaluate the risk of harm to the subject’s own children or those for whom they have parentalresponsibility.</p> <p>Consider the welfare and support needs of the child or other children in the household.</p> <p>Discuss any previous allegations or concern.</p> <p>Plan any enquiries needed and allocate tasks and timescales.</p> <p>Identify a lead contact manager within each agency.</p> <p>Decide what information can be shared with whom, when and who will do this.</p> <p>Agree dates for further strategy meetings.</p> <p>Consider whether the adult’s suitability to continue to care for children has put their future as a foster carer at risk.</p> <p>Consider whether the adult’s suitability to work with children or vulnerable adults in their employment capacity has been called in to question</p> <p>Consider any disciplinary issues to be followed up.</p> <p>Consider any other factors relevant to the case such as a media strategy.</p> <p>Confirm arrangements for who will communicate with the person the allegation is concerning.</p> <p>Confirm arrangements about who will speak to the child or children involved.</p> <p>Identify the need for a planning meeting to coordinate changes to care arrangements if necessary.</p> <p>* Further/follow on strategy meetings can be convened as part of the process to monitor and coordinate actions as required.</p>
Timescales	<p>Following the initial strategy discussion and recommendation that threshold is met for a professional strategy meeting.</p> <p>Timescales are set by the respective national and local child protection procedures.</p> <p>Good practice determines that the Professional Strategy Meeting should take place within 24-48 hours after the initial professional strategy discussion</p>





Outcomes strategy meeting	
Who convenes and chairs?	The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) OR relevant senior person with responsibility for safeguarding.
Who is involved?	As per the initial strategy meeting. The chairperson (DOS/LADO) of the meeting will confirm and agree the necessary representation from each agency.
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b> to consider the analysis of all the information from the investigation and confirm how enquiries should be concluded.</p> <p>The following outcomes are possible:</p> <p><b>Substantiated:</b> This means there is evidence that the allegation has been proven.</p> <p><b>Unsubstantiated:</b> This means there is not enough evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. It does not imply guilt or innocence but is reflective of an inconclusive outcome.</p> <p><b>Unfounded:</b> This means there is evidence to disprove the allegation.</p> <p><b>Malicious<sup>1</sup>:</b></p> <p>This means the allegation is entirely false and there is clear evidence to prove that there has been a deliberate act to deceive.</p> <p>Ensure that the appropriate referrals are made to the Disclosure, Barring Service, and registering bodies of the adults involved if applicable.</p>
Timescales	Following confirmation from relevant agencies that the investigation has concluded.

1 Following the Child Safeguarding Practice Review into the murder of Star Hobson, the review panel concluded that the use of the term malicious ‘has many attendant risks and (we) would therefore discourage its usage as a professional conclusion.’





Post outcome planning meeting (post outcomes strategy meeting when the outcome is substantiated or unsubstantiated).	
Who convenes and chairs?	The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (DOS) or Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). OR relevant senior person with responsibility for safeguarding.
Who is involved?	<p>Attendance at this meeting should, if possible, include those present at the strategy outcomes meeting and include at a minimum the following members of staff:</p> <p>Fostering team manager</p> <p>Supervising social worker</p> <p>Child’s social worker</p> <p>Child’s team manager</p> <p>Independent reviewing officer</p> <p>Any other participant deemed necessary</p>
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b> To analyse findings and make a recommendation in relation to continued suitability to foster following a substantiated or unsubstantiated outcome. This may include restrictions on future approval statuses and expectations in respect of continued assessment, such as progressing to standards of care assessment.</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> Consider the ongoing care of, or return of children in view of professional strategy meeting outcome decision.</p> <p>Analysis and consideration of fostering regulatory requirements</p> <p>Agree next steps in relation to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any care standards assessments and timescales</li><li>• Future children being matched and timescales</li><li>• Review of approval status</li><li>• Learning and development needs (service &amp; foster carers)</li><li>• Enhanced monitoring requirements</li></ul> <p>A substantiated or unsubstantiated outcome does not automatically indicate that a termination of approval is required.</p> <p>These further assessments are required to be completed prior to annual review and return to fostering panel</p>
Timescales	Following the conclusion of the outcome strategy meeting. This meeting will most likely be held immediately after the strategy outcome meeting concludes.





Foster Carer resolutions meeting	
Who convenes and chairs?	Fostering team manager
Who is involved?	<p>Fostering team manager (Chairperson)</p> <p>Supervising social worker</p> <p>Child’s social Worker</p> <p>Foster carer</p> <p>Foster carer’s support or advocate.</p> <p>Any other participant deemed necessary to support the resolution of matters.</p>
Purpose and agenda	<p><b>Purpose:</b> To de-brief following and investigation and consider the impact on the foster carer and their family.</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> The impact of any decision to remove a child.</p> <p>The needs of everyone in the foster carer’s family.</p> <p>The perspective of the fostering service.</p> <p>Clarification of the foster carer’s current approval and communication in respect of any further assessments or review of approval.</p> <p>Feedback from the fostering family on the way the investigation was conducted and how the fostering service undertook their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Lessons to be learnt for the foster carer in respect of things that could be done differently and implications for future children.</p> <p>Lessons to be learnt for the Local Authority or Fostering Service about things that could be done differently.</p> <p>Learning and development needs of the foster carer or the fostering service.</p> <p>Any on-going welfare issues for the foster carer or members of their household arising from their experiences.</p> <p>To consider wellbeing, endings, relationship repair and counselling needs</p>
Timescales	To be agreed by Fostering Team Manager, particularly if there is to be a care standards assessment prior to a return to Fostering Panel, but best practice would suggest it occurs no later than 2 weeks after an investigation has been concluded.

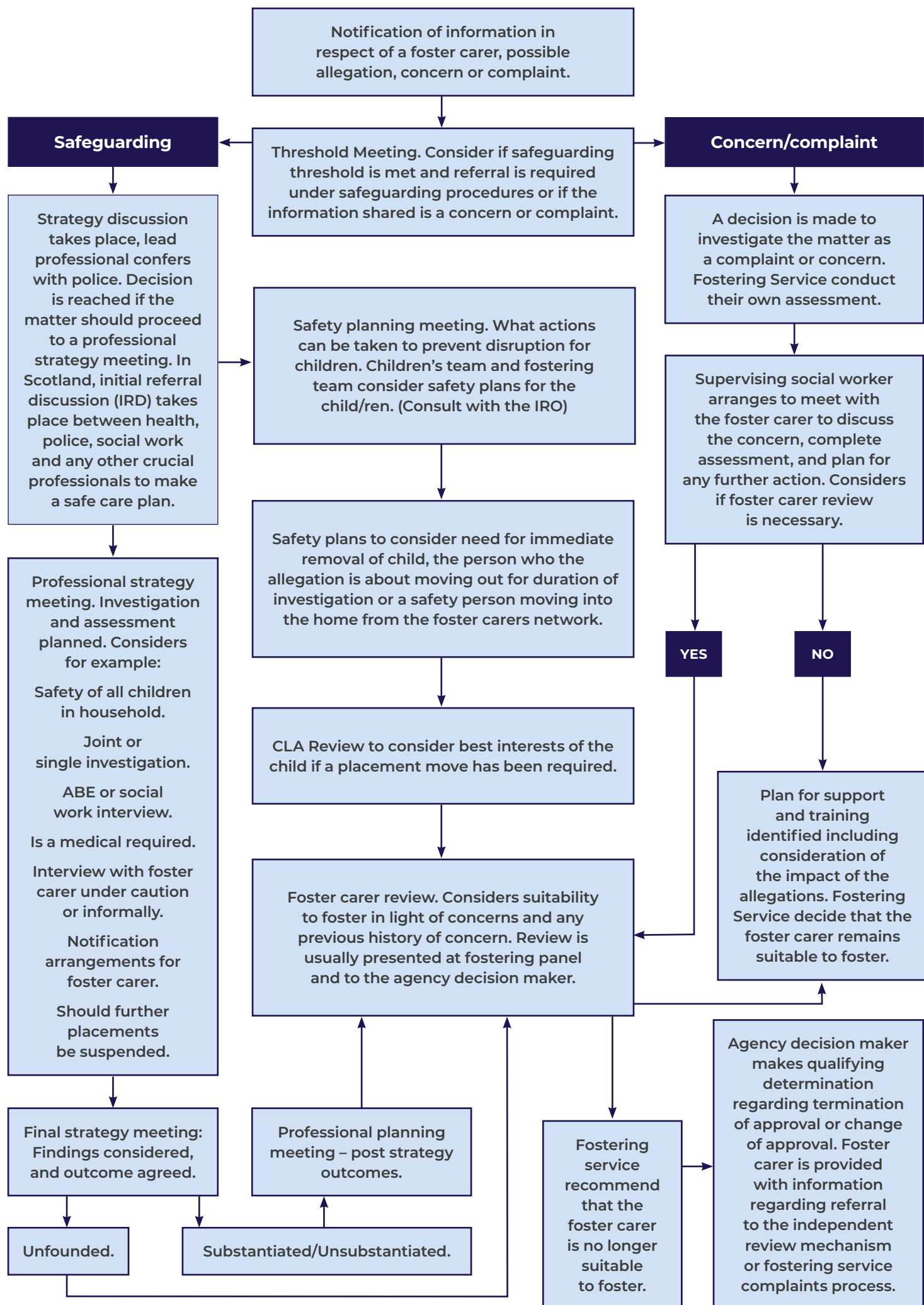


Child's resolutions meeting	
Who convenes and chairs?	Child's social worker and supervising social worker
Who is involved?	Child Foster carer Child's social worker Supervising social worker Child's advocate (if applicable)
Purpose and agenda	<b>Purpose:</b> To ensure that all involved have an opportunity to conclude what has happened positively.  For the child to know they are not to blame.  An opportunity to have a positive ending if the child has moved on.  To consider wellbeing, endings, relationship repair and counselling needs.
Timescales	Following the professional's Resolutions Meeting and only if deemed suitable for all involved.  Meeting is to be positive, trauma informed and in the best interest of the child, if this is unlikely to be achieved then should not be convened.

The table above (*Table 4*) outlines the meetings that are necessary for the investigative process when an allegation has been made against a foster carer. The process map on the following page is designed to help professionals gain a greater understanding the required actions in an allegations investigation.

Allegations process map (*Table 5*)





# Roles and responsibilities – The primary professionals involved in the process

While the following list of roles and responsibilities is not exhaustive, it provides a summary of the key responsibilities of the professionals involved in the process. All actions are to some extent dependent on individual circumstances and on the recommendations from the professional strategy meeting.

## The lead safeguarding officer

Three of the four nations has a nominated role within a Local Authority who is responsible for managing and monitoring safeguarding allegations in relation to paid and unpaid social care workers and providing advice information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations about safeguarding.

These roles are referred to as:

The Local Authority Designated Officer (England)

The Designated Officer for Safeguarding (Wales)

The Designated Manager (Scotland)

In Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Trusts Gateway Services and Social Care Governance departments undertake these roles.





## Manager of the fostering service (local authority) or manager of regulated fostering service

The Fostering Service Manager is the individual responsible for ensuring that the fostering service complies with statutory child protection guidance and fostering regulations in relation to the treatment of foster carers and to the actions required when an allegation is made. Their responsibilities include:

- Informing the safeguarding lead (LADO or DOS) within 24 hours when an allegation is made about a foster carer.
- Communication between the Fostering Manager and the Children's Team Manager in relation to the allegation and any action required to safeguard the child in placement.
- Deciding what information is shared with the foster carer at this stage.
- Ensuring that the foster carer is informed verbally and in writing following the decisions of the strategy meeting.
- Ensuring that there are policies in place for safeguarding young people in foster care and procedures for dealing with allegations, and that all staff and foster carers have access to these and have regular training and supervision.
- Ensuring that the fostering service is represented at strategy meetings and other meetings and all relevant fostering information is provided to assist with the investigation (see Appendix 1)
- Ensuring that foster carers are provided with the relevant training and support in accordance with regulatory responsibilities.
- Ensuring that information about any allegation is recorded and stored confidentially.
- Notifying relevant regulatory bodies (e.g., The Care Inspectorate Wales or Ofsted) if required
- Making decisions about financial or other support for foster carers in accordance with local policy and procedure.





## The supervising social worker

The supervising social worker's role when an allegation is made is to:

- Alert the fostering manager and consult with the child's social worker as soon as a report is received.
- Make the referral to the local authority if requested to do. (For staff within regulated fostering services.)
- Attend all meetings and provide relevant information to assist the process of the investigation.
- Keep detailed recordings throughout the process, ensuring that factual information is distinguished from opinion.
- Ensure that copies of relevant foster care recordings are shared with the child's social worker and added to the child's case file.
- Support the child's social worker when notifying the foster carer verbally of the allegations.
- Stay in contact with the foster carer and keep them updated in accordance with the agreement of the professional strategy meeting.
- Plan for support including independent support and financial support if agreed.
- Arrange the foster care annual review at the conclusion of the process.
- Ensure that the outcome is recorded on the foster carers case record.
- Contribute to any further meetings, post the outcome strategy meeting such as professional planning meetings or resolutions meetings.

## The child's social worker

When an allegation is made against a foster carer it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to:

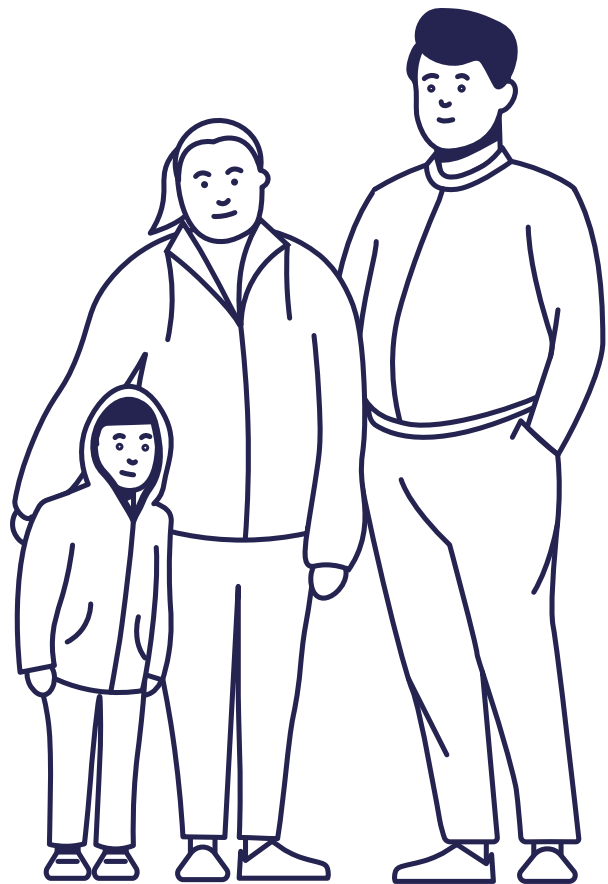
- Notify their manager as soon as an allegation has been made.
- Ensure that the fostering service is made aware of the allegation as soon as possible.
- Assist the line manager and fostering manager in deciding whether the child is currently safe, and whether a medical examination is needed.
- Arrange a child protection medical if required.
- Notify the child's Independent Reviewing Officer that an allegation has been made and where a placement move is being proposed.
- Notify the foster carer that an allegation has been made (supported by the supervising social worker).
- Support the child or young person during the process including what will happen next and arranging to support with a placement move if required.
- Be present if the professional strategy meeting agrees that the child will be interviewed by the police or alternatively talk to the child directly if a single agency investigation is agreed.
- Keep detailed recordings.
- Attend all professional strategy meetings and other meetings as required and keep their line manager informed and updated.
- Attend any further professional meetings or resolution meetings as required to conclude the process.

## The police

The police have legal responsibilities and a range of powers to investigate crimes against children and taking protective action where necessary along with the local authority.

When an allegation is made against a foster carer their responsibilities include:

- Establishing if a crime has been committed that requires a police investigation.
- Assessing the risk of harm to a child and taking any immediate action to protect them if necessary.
- Sharing relevant intelligence and background information at the professional strategy meeting. This includes any cautions or convictions recorded on the police database.
- Considering a formal interview with the foster carer who is subject to an allegation.
- Consider the need for an ABE (Achieving Best Evidence) interview with the child or young person who has made the allegation.





# Conclusion of the process

At the end of the investigative process, the outcomes strategy meeting should provide clarity on the outcome that has been concluded as part of the professional strategy process. This outcome will inform and determine the next steps for the foster carers and the fostering service. We cover a section on professional strategy meeting outcomes at the start of this publication.

Once the strategy meeting has fulfilled its statutory remit, the investigation is concluded and it is the responsibility of the fostering service to make recommendations regarding the foster carer’s future approval status.

The children’s social work team is responsible for decisions regarding the child, arranging a Child Looked After Review and updating and supporting the child with the outcome if necessary.

At the conclusion of the final strategy meeting, the supervising social worker will communicate the outcome verbally to the foster carer. The foster carer will also receive communication in writing from the chair of the strategy meeting, advising them of the outcome. It is good practice for the fostering manager to confirm the outcome in writing, setting out the implications of the outcome and the plan for any further action if required.

## Actions required following a substantiated outcome

It will be necessary to convene a post-outcomes professional planning meeting to review the substantiated outcome in the context of the fostering regulations and agree a plan for further assessment. A substantiated outcome does not automatically result in termination of approval. Every situation will be unique and the focus for an assessment of continued approval should include consideration of the needs of any children and the best outcome for them. It may be that the foster carer can continue to meet the regulations to foster for a specific child only or with a change to their approval status. A foster carer annual review should be arranged to consider the foster carer’s continued suitability to foster, or whether a change of approval status should be recommended.

If there is evidence of serious harm or conduct that is incompatible with continued approval as a foster carer, then the fostering service will recommend termination of the foster carer’s approval.

A resolutions meeting with the foster carer should be convened at the earliest opportunity following the conclusion of the strategy meeting process to de-brief and provide feedback to the fostering service. This may help to re-establish trust and confidence and limit the



potential for the foster carer resigning from their role due to the stress they have experienced. If the foster carers decide not to continue to foster or are no longer deemed able to meet the regulatory requirements to foster, a resolutions meeting may support the relationship to end on a positive note, with feedback and learning considered and addressed.

### **Actions required following an unsubstantiated outcome**

The outcome strategy meeting may be unable to reach a conclusive decision as to whether the allegation against the foster carer is founded. In these circumstances the fostering service must assess the continued suitability to foster as if the allegation were founded. It will be necessary to convene a post-outcomes professional planning meeting to review the unsubstantiated outcome in the context of the fostering regulations and agree a plan for further assessment. An unsubstantiated outcome does not automatically result in termination of approval. Every situation will be unique and the focus for an assessment of continued approval should include consideration of the needs of any children and the best outcome for them. It may be that the foster carer can continue to meet the regulations to foster for a specific child only or with a change to their approval status. A foster carer annual review should be arranged to consider the foster carer's continued suitability to foster, or whether a change of approval status should be recommended.

This can be a difficult outcome for the foster carer as it indicates lingering doubt about their conduct and can be stressful for them to manage. It is essential that the fostering service make any further assessments or provide any additional support to the foster carer and their family, to be satisfied of the foster carer's continued suitability to foster as quickly as possible.

It is important to bear in mind that an unsubstantiated outcome does not mean that the allegation was untrue – just that there was not enough information for professionals to reach a firm conclusion. When considering continued suitability to foster unsubstantiated outcomes should be assessed and reviewed in the same way as substantiated. Some foster carers may be the subject of more than one unsubstantiated allegation or concern. A post-outcomes professionals meeting is a useful mechanism for reviewing the information and considering the need for further assessment of areas of concern, or gaps in the foster carer's training and knowledge, considering future expectations and levels of monitoring. While some foster carers may experience this as unnecessarily intrusive, it can be a helpful way of confirming with the foster carer that their fostering service is satisfied that the outcome does not highlight unresolved matters.

A resolutions meeting with the foster carer should be convened at the earliest opportunity following the conclusion of the strategy meeting process to de-brief

and provide feedback to the fostering service. This may help to re-establish trust and confidence and limit the potential for the foster carer resigning from their role due to the stress they have experienced.

### **Actions required following an unfounded outcome**

If the allegation is unfounded, it should be recorded and made clear to the foster carer in writing. It is important to protect the foster carer from any lingering doubts and suspicions. It is the responsibility of the fostering manager to determine whether an early annual review and presentation to fostering panel is required following an unfounded outcome but, in most cases, this is not necessary. The allegation can be explored as part of the routine annual review process, in line with the services usual practice. The fostering service should use this opportunity to reflect with the foster carer on how the foster carers engaged in what was likely a hugely stressful situation and their ability to keep the child's best interests at the centre of all their actions. The fostering manager and the supervising social worker should consider whether any further support is required by the foster carer or the fostering family. Additionally, a resolutions meeting should be convened with the foster carer to de-brief and allow the carer to express their feelings and views about the investigation. This may help to re-establish trust and confidence and limit the potential for the foster carer resigning from their role due to the stress they have experienced.

### **A note on the use of malicious outcome**

It is often extremely difficult to determine that an allegation has been made maliciously. The NSPCC highlight the need to avoid labelling allegations as 'malicious'<sup>19</sup>. Following the Child Safeguarding Practice Review into the murder of Star Hobson, the review panel concluded that the use of the term malicious 'has many attendant risks and [we] would therefore discourage its usage as a professional conclusion.'

Key points to take away include:

- Recording allegations as 'malicious' impacts the way professionals perceive and respond to concerns.
- Allegations of abuse should be fully investigated before a decision is made about their validity.
- The focus of the investigation should be on evidence of harm or risk of harm to a child and what is in the child's best interests.
- By sharing information with other agencies working with the family, it is possible to identify whether there is a pattern of allegations, which might require a safeguarding or criminal justice response.

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<sup>19</sup> Why language matters: why you should avoid labelling allegations as 'malicious' – NSPCC Words Matter.

## Reviews of foster carer's approval following allegations, concerns or complaints

Following the outcome of an investigation, the main task for the fostering service is to consider the foster carer's continued suitability to foster. It is the responsibility of the fostering manager to determine whether an early annual review should follow the outcome of a child protection investigation, and this is likely to be determined by the outcome and the individual circumstances of the case. However, in most cases it is good practice to convene an annual review following the outcome of an investigation into an allegation or serious concern.

The review is a focus for considering information from the investigation, as well as the foster carer's experiences from the preceding year. Looking at a range of information can provide a more robust and reflective experience than focusing just on recent safeguarding issues.

It is vital to consult with all relevant parties as part of the review process. This will include the child's social worker, the independent reviewing officer, the child or children in foster care and any other child in the household, as well as the foster carer. In situations where the allegation has led to a child being moved from the foster home, it is necessary to get an end of placement feedback report from the child's social worker and understand the views of the child who has moved home. It is

essential to listen to and understand the views of children in the household in child-centred practice.

The annual review can consider:

- The current issue in the context of any previous allegations or concerns.
- The significance of the allegation and investigation on the carers, their household and the child or children in their care.
- Ensuring that the foster carer has an opportunity to feedback on the concerns.
- Highlighting strengths as well as vulnerabilities or worries evidenced over the preceding fostering year.
- Identifying gaps in the foster carer's practice and knowledge.
- Formulating a view as to whether the foster carer's terms of approval are still appropriate.
- Making recommendations about the foster carer's training and development, monitoring and support requirements, such as counselling services or mediation, as well as recommending the carer's terms of approval or termination of approval.

The reviewing officer will evaluate all the information that is presented and make recommendations for future action and approval. It is best practice for the annual review to return to fostering panel to consider the outcome. Fostering panels should have oversight of the overall fostering services concerns, complaints and allegations as part of the quality and monitoring requirements.



## **Fostering panel**

The fostering manager will read the review and consider the recommendations for further action. It is the responsibility of the fostering manager to determine if the review should be presented at panel (except in the case of the first annual review and those where there is a recommendation for a change of approval). In most situations where there has been a child protection investigation that has led to an early annual review, the fostering manager should recommend a return to fostering panel to ensure that the recommended outcome is subject to an appropriate level of scrutiny. The fostering panel plays a vital role in ensuring that foster carers who have been approved to look after children continue to remain suitable to do so, and what the terms of the foster carer's approval should be. This is particularly important following a child protection investigation where there have been concerns about a foster carer's ability to safeguard a child in their care.

## **Fostering panel advisor**

Although the presence of the fostering panel advisor is not a statutory requirement across the UK, they play a key role in ensuring that the fostering panel has all the relevant information to satisfy itself that they are able to consider the foster carer's continued approval following child protection enquiries.

## **Fostering panel chair**

The panel chair is responsible for leading the panel discussion and ensuring that the information presented to panel following an investigation about a foster carer is evaluated. The panel chair has a responsibility to support the panel in reaching a recommendation about the future approval of the foster carer and ensuring that recommendations provided to the agency decision maker are carefully considered and explained. The chair also helps to ensure that the foster carers are treated fairly and that their views are listened to and considered. The foster carer may wish to bring a support person with them to panel, or a representative from an independent agency. The panel chair and panel advisor will be responsible for deciding whether they can attend, for explaining to any support people the remit of panel and the limitations of their involvement. It is good practice to accept a foster carer's request for additional support, unless the individual circumstances deem this to be inappropriate.







## The agency decision maker

The agency decision maker is usually a senior manager within the fostering service or local authority who can make decisions on behalf of the service.

When a fostering panel has made a recommendation for the termination of a foster carer's approval, or a change of their approval status, the agency decision maker must make a qualifying determination about the foster carer's suitability to foster. This means they must make a proposed decision. The foster carer will be provided with a qualifying determination letter, ideally within seven working days of receipt of the minutes from the fostering panel. The foster carer can contact the agency decision maker to challenge this decision within twenty-eight working days or alternatively can apply to the independent review mechanism for a review of the qualifying determination<sup>20</sup>.

## Foster carer resignation during an investigation

It is not uncommon for foster carers to offer their resignation during a standard of care or an allegation investigation. In this situation, the foster carer's approval will end automatically at the end of their 28-day notice period.

However, the assessment of the foster carers continued suitability to foster should be completed and referred to fostering panel irrelevant of the resignation. This ensures that the records held by the fostering service and any referral to the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) continue to be actioned and provide an accurately recorded audit trail. This is particularly important in the context of foster carers who resign during the process and then apply to foster in the future with another fostering service.

## Notifications

Fostering services need to check whether there is a requirement to notify their national regulatory body that a foster carer has been the subject of an allegation and has been referred to the relevant barring service<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/being-foster-carer/reviews>

<sup>21</sup> England – The Fostering Regulations 2011 state referral to OFSTED. The Local Authority Regulations Services (Wales) 2018, and the Regulated Fostering Services (Wales) 2019 set out the duties for the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)







# Moving on: A restorative approach

Investigation can be a painful and life changing event for foster carers, with a range of serious consequences. These include negative impacts on emotional and physical health, relationship difficulties, and financial consequences arising from changes to fostering finance during the process. The Fostering Network State of the Nations' Survey 2024 highlight the devastating impact that this can have on the retention of foster carers with 18% of former foster carers naming allegations as a factor contributing to them resigning and 26% of current foster carers naming it as a factor contributing to them considering resigning<sup>22</sup>. This section highlights best practice approaches in supporting foster carers to continue their role after an allegation, and to recommend fostering to others who are considering it. This is particularly important in the context of the shortage of foster carers, but also in supporting placement stability for children in care.

## The resolutions meetings

A best practice approach suggests that in most circumstances foster carers should be offered the opportunity to engage in a resolution meeting following the end of the investigation.

This is different from a disruptions or placement stability meeting in that it focuses primarily on the foster carer and their family rather than the fostered child.

The resolutions meeting is best chaired by the team manager or line manager of the supervising social worker, and should include the foster carer, their family members and support person (if requested), as well as the child's social worker if appropriate. It is important to ensure that this meeting is not a replay of the investigation but takes a restorative approach, which is concerned with listening to both sides, acknowledging any hurt caused and taking steps to repair the relationship<sup>23</sup>. This approach is particularly helpful in situations where there has been conflict and professional relationships have become fractured because of the allegations process. It encourages both parties to reflect on what has happened, take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of harm on the foster carer and their family and remedy or 'make good' any harm caused.

22 Ellis, S. and Williams, N. (2025) *State of the Nations' Foster Care 2024*, The Fostering Network  
23 Finniss, Restorative Practice, (2021), Independent Thinking Press



It is important that the meeting happens as soon as practicable after the conclusion of the investigation, as this has been shown to help minimise the impact on foster carers and promote accountability and learning for both parties.

The meetings table (Table 4) sets out potential agenda items for this meeting. The key thing to bear in mind is that a restorative approach is concerned with listening to both sides, acknowledging any hurt caused and taking steps to repair the relationship.

This approach is not inconsistent with the implementation of actions or practice recommendations arising from the investigation, or an assessment of

suitability to continue fostering. It is rooted in a high degree of transparency, clear expectations and consequences for noncompliance.

Where deemed suitable, it is also good practice to consider facilitating a meeting between the foster carer and the child involved in the allegation. The purpose of this restorative meeting is to ensure that both parties have an opportunity to conclude what has happened and if the child has moved on, to say goodbye in a calm and measured manner. Best hopes are for the child and the foster carers to respect the part they have played in each other's life journey work and for all involved to move on.





## Historic allegations

Many allegations of a safeguarding nature are not made until a child has left care<sup>24</sup> and it is not unusual for fostering services to receive complaints and allegations about foster carers by adults who were once looked after in foster care. The NSPCC refers to this as non-recent abuse<sup>25</sup>. These may be accompanied by subject access requests (SARs) which require the fostering service to provide a copy of their social care records.

Statutory guidance in all four nations is clear that all allegations of non-recent abuse must be followed up and investigated in the same rigorous manner as any other safeguarding enquiry.

However, while the process of referral and investigation will be similar, enquiries are likely to be more complicated and determined by a range of individual circumstances, for example, if the foster carer is still approved and has children in their care; if more than one individual is involved, or if more than one local authority is involved.

In circumstances where a non-recent allegation about a foster carer is made, the fostering manager or other responsible manager must make a referral to the designated safeguarding lead who will consider if safeguarding procedures need to be followed.

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24 Biehal et al, (2014) *A Sense of Belonging: Meanings of Family and Home in Long-Term Foster Care*, British Journal of Social Work

25 Non-recent abuse, NSPCC

Appendix 1

Legislation

Legislation, statutory guidance and regulations for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. (Table 1)

Country	Allegations and child protection concerns	Concerns and complaints
England	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Sec 47 Children Act 1989</p> <p>Sec 11 Children Act 2004</p> <p><b>Statutory guidance</b></p> <p>Working Together (DFE 2023)</p> <p><b>Regulations</b></p> <p>Fostering Regulations (England) 2011 (Vol 4)</p> <p>National Minimum Standards (England 2011)</p>	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p><b>Statutory guidance</b></p> <p>Getting the Best from Complaints: Social Care Complaints and representations for children, young people, and others: Statutory guidance for local authority children's services (DfE 2006)</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 4 Fostering Services.</p>

Country	Allegations and child protection concerns	Concerns and complaints
Northern Ireland	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.</p> <p>Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007</p> <p>Children’s Service Co-operation Act (NI) 2015</p> <p>Adoption and Children Act (NI) 2022</p> <p><b>Statutory guidance</b></p> <p>Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (Department of Health 2024)</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 Guidance and Regulations Vol 3: Family Placements and Private Fostering.</p>	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Children and Northern Ireland Order 1995 (S45)</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>The Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996</p> <p>UK National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (1999)</p> <p>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1992</p>



Country	Allegations and child protection concerns	Concerns and complaints
Northern Ireland	<p>The Review of Children’s Cases Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996</p> <p>The Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025</p> <p>The National Minimum Standards for Foster care (1999)</p> <p>The Arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1996</p> <p>The Regional Core Child Protection Policy and Procedures for NI 2018</p> <p>Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse NI 2021</p> <p>Interface Protocol between HSC Trust and PSNI re Children Missing from Care 2023</p> <p>Looked After Children Handbook of Policies and Procedures – Volume 2</p> <p>Protecting Looked After Children Guidance 2018</p> <p>A Life Deserved – A Strategy for Looked After Children 2021</p> <p>SPPG Procedure for the Reporting and Follow Up of Serious Adverse Incidents 2016</p> <p>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1992</p>	



Country	Allegations and child protection concerns	Concerns and complaints
Scotland	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012</p> <p>Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011</p> <p>Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014</p> <p>Children (Scotland) Act 2020</p> <p>Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968</p> <p>Local Government in Scotland Act 2003</p> <p>Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007</p> <p><b>Statutory guidance</b></p> <p>National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021</p> <p>Managing Allegations against Foster Carers and Approved Kinship Foster Carers: How agencies should respond. 2013</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009</p> <p>National Care Standards (Foster Care and Family Placement Services) 2005</p>	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Public Service Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, Part 5.</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>National Care Standards (Foster Care and Family Placement Services) 2005</p>

Country	Allegations and child protection concerns	Concerns and complaints
Wales	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p>Social Services and Well Being Act 2014 (Replacing Part 3 of the Children Act with Part 3, 4 &amp; 6 of the SSWBA)</p> <p>Local Authority (Wales) Fostering Services Regulations 2018 (as amended)</p> <p>Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers &amp; Responsible Individuals) Regulations (Wales) 2019.</p> <p><b>Statutory guidance</b></p> <p>Working Together to Safeguard People 2014 Vol 5: Handling Individual Cases to Protect Children at Risk (Wales)</p> <p>Statutory Guidance Fostering Services: Regulated Fostering Services (Wales) 2019</p> <p><b>Regulations and guidance</b></p> <p>Wales Safeguarding Procedures. Chapter 11 and Section 5: Safeguarding Allegations: Concerns about professionals and those in positions of trust.</p> <p>The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Code of Practice 2018.</p>	<p><b>Legislation</b></p> <p>The Local Government Act 1974 (Part 3)</p> <p><b>Regulations</b></p> <p>A guide to handling complaints and representations by ocal Authority Social Services. Welsh Government (2014b)</p>





Template 1.

Fostering service report for professional strategy meeting

Date of completion	
Name of foster carers	
Name of supervising social worker	
Name of fostering team manager	
Name, D.O.B and social worker of children currently looked after in the household (include start dates of placement)	
Name and D.O.B of foster carers own children and/or other children in household. (e.g. children for whom the foster carer/s are special guardians)	
Other persons in the home	
Detail of allegation (including date of referral)	
Emergency action taken to protect child (if required)	
Foster carer's approval status:	
Foster carers approval date:	
Foster carers DBS status and date:	



Foster carers next annual review date:	
Date of Last supervision/ supervising social worker visit:	
Previous children cared for:	
Training attended:	
Any previous allegations, concerns or complaints: (dates & details)	
Other Information: <i>(if relevant dependent on individual circumstances)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedroom sharing – attach risk assessment.</li> <li>• Family protective care plan and individual child protective care plan.</li> <li>• Health &amp; safety assessment/ information.</li> <li>• Record of accident, illness, and injury.</li> </ul>	
Any other relevant information.	

## Non Davies

Having worked in local authority childcare and fostering teams, as well as with BAAF Cymru and AFA Cymru, Non has extensive experience of working with children and families, in policy development, and in safeguarding. Non has experience as an Independent Reviewing Officer, and as Chair of Child Protection Conferences, and is currently a Chair of Fostering and Adoption Panels. Non is an author of Child Practice Reviews, Serious Case Reviews, and of a Domestic Homicide Review. Non has project managed the regional implementation of the National Fostering Framework in North Wales, as well as having been the Interim Business Manager for the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board for a period.

## Samantha Frith Jones

Sam qualified as a social worker in Wales in 2006. She began her employment working with families and children in need of protection and children looked after. Whilst in these teams she realised she had a passion for ensuring best outcomes for those children who were unable to return home to their families. Sam went on to spend the majority of her career to date working in a Local Authority fostering service. Her work has had a particular focus on achieving permanence and stability for children and supporting foster carers and the team around the child to succeed. Sam joined AFKA Cymru in 2021 and is passionate about sharing good practice in the permanency sector.

## Tracy Bowen

Tracy has been a social worker since 1990 and in that time she has worked in a range of children and families' settings in England and Wales. Her social work roles have included practitioner, team manager, service manager and IRO. Tracy has also worked for several years for CAFCASS London region as a Children's Guardian and Service Manager. Prior to joining AFKA Cymru, Tracy was employed as a Foster Wales Team Manager and has worked in the Fostering Sector for thirteen years. Tracy has a keen interest in trauma informed practice and supporting foster carers and practitioners to develop a therapeutic approach towards the care of children looked after.

## Sarah Thomas

Sarah qualified as a social worker in 2004, prior to this she worked with children with additional needs in education settings and with young people in residential care. Sarah's career has spanned a range of roles supporting vulnerable children and families. Following a successful career in local authority practice, Sarah programme managed the work of the National Fostering Framework through to the launch of Foster Wales in 2021. She has previously served as Service Manager for AFA Cymru, Director for England and Wales at The Fostering Network and was appointed CEO of The Fostering Network in 2023. Sarah's knowledge and expertise in the fostering sector is extensive, advising on policy and practice in both the UK and internationally.



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of children in foster care.

We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all children and young people in foster care experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for 50 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level.



This toolkit was created thanks to the generosity of practitioners, foster carers and young people who shared insight, knowledge and experiences to improve outcomes for others.

The authors of this product worked together to collate and create this collection of best practice guidance and tools.

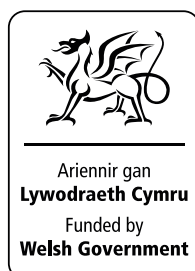
This work is a collaboration and includes expertise and content from Non Davies, Samantha Frith-Jones, Tracy Bowen and Sarah Thomas.

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