

Will details of the investigation be kept on my fostering records or shared with anyone else?

It is important that the fostering service keeps a summary of any allegations made, details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, and details of any action taken and decisions reached, on a person's confidential file. However a copy of all information which is kept on file about you will be available to you.

The purpose of the record is to enable accurate information to be available to the fostering service, for inspection by Ofsted or given in response to any future request for a reference. It will also provide clarification in cases where a future Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure reveals information from the police that an allegation was made but did not result in a prosecution or a conviction.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board will also keep a record of any allegation of abuse against persons working with children for monitoring purposes. They will hold personal information including contact details, the nature of the allegation and the outcome. This information will be stored securely in line with the Data Protection Act requirements.

Good Practice in dealing with allegations

Being under investigation is always stressful, but the fostering service can help by:

- Minimising delay
- Providing you with written information
- Being open and honest
- Ensuring access to independent support

If you are unhappy about the way you have been treated by the Fostering Service, you are able to complain. If you are unhappy about the way the investigation was conducted, you should contact the Local Authority's Solutions Team:-

Solutions Team
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Headquarters
58, Nicholas Street,
Chester CH1 2 NP
01244 975966

Experience shows that children can be subjected to abuse by those who are supposed to be caring for them. It is essential that children do not feel inhibited from reporting abuse against them by foster carers or others. Children have a right to be treated properly and any incident where a child or adult feels that a trusted adult has crossed the boundary of acceptable behaviour should be reported.

All individuals who work with children must ensure that the environment they work or live in encourages children to make truthful reports of unacceptable behaviour.



SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS

SUPPORTING FOSTER CARERS

Dealing with an allegation

This leaflet aims to provide information to those who foster children about what happens if an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against them. It also provides information about other situations where there is a concern about the boundaries of acceptable behaviour with a child.

Becoming the subject of an allegation is always stressful for the foster carer concerned and for their family. The task for everyone involved is to ensure that children are effectively safeguarded and that their welfare is promoted while at the same time treating foster carers who are accused, fairly and honestly.

What happens when an allegation is made?

When an allegation is made about a foster carer, the carer is likely to feel stressed and may also feel aggrieved. The fostering service must refer the matter to the Local Authority's Designated Officer (LADO) whose role it is to offer advice in these circumstances, oversee any necessary investigation and monitor what happens.

The Local Authority Designated Officer will discuss the concerns with the fostering service and the child's social work team. If the concerns are of a serious nature, a referral to the Police will be advised and a strategy meeting held.

The Cheshire West and Chester Local Safeguarding Children's Board [LSCB] provides detailed guidance to all agencies about the procedures to be followed, Your supervising social worker will provide you with a copy of this guidance on request, or you can access all the guidance from the LSCB website <http://www.cheshirewestlscb.org.uk/>

What form does the enquiry take?

There are 3 related but separate sets of enquiries which may need to take place. Each differs in terms of focus and can have different outcomes. The 3 types of enquiries are:

- Child protection enquiries, relating to the safety and welfare of any children who are or who may have been involved
- A police investigation into a possible offence
- Fostering review procedures; where it appears to be appropriate a review will always be carried out when the above enquiries are complete.

The fostering service will aim to inform you about the existence of the allegation as soon as they receive it. However they may not be able to do this until after they have consulted with other agencies. In most circumstances, you could expect to be informed of the substance of the allegation within 3 days of the fostering service receiving it.

What happens if everyone thinks the allegation is serious?

The LADO, in conjunction with Children and Family Services and the Police will hold a strategy meeting to agree what type of enquiries will need to take place and what is required to safeguard any children involved. You will not be part of the strategy meeting, although your supervising social worker will be. In cases where the Police are not investigating, but the concerns re boundary keeping or inappropriate behaviour are sufficiently serious to warrant further investigation of the incident or of behaviour, the Local Authority Designated Officer will ensure that the person undertaking the investigation is sufficiently independent to provide a measured view of the details and implications of the allegation.

How will I know what has been decided?

The Local Authority Designated Officer or the Fostering Service will keep you informed of what type of enquiries will be carried out and the expected timescales. You can expect to be treated fairly, be informed verbally and in writing about the nature of the concerns and be informed of all decisions as soon as possible. It is usual practice for the professionals involved to meet every 4 weeks to review the progress of any prolonged investigation. Lesser concerns should be dealt with, within 14 days.

Where can I get independent support from?

Independent support can be a great help and benefit to you. You should seek help by contacting any of the following:

- Fostering Network Helpline
- Independent Support organised by the Fostering Service
- Your Supervising Social Worker
- General Practitioner

Nb The Fostering network have developed an leaflet 'Allegations against Foster Carers' which your supervising social can provide.

Will I be suspended from fostering whilst enquiries are ongoing?

Generally this will not happen automatically, or without careful thought. The impact on the child [or children] in placement will also be a consideration.

The strategy group will need to consider, as any investigation progresses if there is cause to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, or if the allegation warrants a police investigation or if the concerns are so serious that it might be grounds for de-registration as a foster carer. Your fostering payments may be affected depending on your circumstances.