

Section 6 - Complaints and Allegations

6.1 Allegations made against carers

An allegation may be made by anyone: a member of the public, a professional, a member of a fostered child's family or by a child and may be made against you or a member of your family. An allegation involves an accusation of abuse or neglect. For example; that a carer has injured a child or someone in the family has behaved in a sexually inappropriate way towards the fostered child.

All allegations are taken seriously and are investigated. In these circumstances the Caerphilly Child Protection Protocol is followed. The full protocol can be obtained on request but it will also be distributed to all carers who experience an allegation. See the following link for more information:

<http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/cscb/index.html>

The issue of allegations is discussed at the pre-approval training and the child protection training. It may be helpful to have further discussion with your allocated worker during home visits.

- How will the allegation be investigated?

Caerphilly Area Child Protection Committee has produced written procedures in line with the All Wales Child Protection procedures for investigating allegations, which must be followed.

As soon as Caerphilly Social Services become aware of an allegation a Professional Strategy Meeting is arranged. This meeting is attended by the Public Protection Unit (PPU), Children's services staff, a member of the fostering team (usually your allocated worker) and is chaired by a Senior Manager.

You are not informed about the Professional Strategy Meeting at this stage, and may not be aware that an accusation of abuse has been made until your allocated worker and/or police visit you at your home. Because of this possibility it is extremely important that you know your rights if you are questioned by the police and a social worker.

The strategy meeting will make decisions in respect of whether the child or young person making the allegation will remain in placement pending the investigation, as well as any other fostered children and young people in the household. It is acknowledged that this can be very difficult time for all involved.

- Support for you

Although you will want to discuss the allegation with your allocated worker, he/she will be unable to provide the level of support you have been used to, due to the worker being an employee of the authority who is responsible for investigating the allegation. The authority does have a duty to keep you informed however, but the first responsibility of the authority must be to protect the child or young person.

You can be provided with support from:

Fostering Network's, Foster Line Wales on 0800 316 7664. This is a general line that can be accessed for practical advice about fostering, for support or simply someone to talk to.

As a member of Fostering Network you are also entitled to receive legal advice and assistance. (A solicitor with expertise in Children's services and criminal law).

Independent support from a social work professional not employed by the authority. This needs to be requested via the Team Manager of the fostering team.

Your own family/close friends.

The primary responsibility is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person placed. On some occasions a few professional strategy meetings may be held and you would normally be given brief feedback from these meetings pending the investigation. At the end of the whole investigation you will be informed of what is to happen to the child or young person and whether the police will take further action.

When an allegation is made a written record of the allegation and outcome is kept. The information is discussed at the Foster Carers Review meeting and is presented to the Foster Panel. It is legally required that an additional Foster Carers Review is held when there has been an allegation against a carer.

If you as a carer decide to move on in the future to apply to another fostering agency (Local Authority or Independent Agencies), the previous agency is required to provide a reference about you, as carers previously registered with them. Where there have been previous allegations, this information will be included.

- Reducing the risk of an allegation being made

It is important to note that any member of the public and employees of Caerphilly County Borough Council may have an allegation made against them. Allegations do not just happen to foster carers.

You can take action to protect yourselves and your family from the likelihood of allegations by contacting:

- Foster Line Wales 0800 316 7664 are available to offer general advice.
- Social Services if you feel anxious and want advice.
- Fostering Team/allocated worker.
- Attending training sessions.
- Talking with your own children and fostered children and young people about how situations will be managed.
- Reading relevant information provided at training sessions and by further discussion if required.
- Putting safe caring into practice.
- Building up a support network (other foster carers, the health visitor, doctors).
- Attending the foster care support group/talking and sharing issues.
- Keeping a daily written log of significant events including who was in the house each day (see next page on recordings).
- Keeping the child or young person's allocated worker informed of events in the child or young person's life and you and your family's feelings. Advising the child or young person's allocated worker with any particular worries etc.
- When dealing with children and young people who are sexually aware, avoiding situations where one member of the foster family (including older children and young people) are left with the child or young person alone without other people (adult) being present.
- Read Foster Care Network's information.
- **Allegations against someone outside of the foster home**

In the event that a child or young person makes a disclosure to you, you must immediately: -

- Notify your allocated worker/duty officer in the fostering team.
- Notify the child or young person's allocated worker or team manager/duty officer.

- Make a written record the information (accurately).
- In the event that a significant disclosure occurs outside office hours you should first contact the out of hours fostering service for advice and guidance.

6.2 Complaints against Foster Carers

Complaints made against foster carers

A foster child, parent, a foster carer or anyone else with an interest in a child's welfare, may make a complaint. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction and may involve a view about a carers approach to the care of a fostered child for example when a child complains they are not being fed properly or a parent complains that a child's culture or religion is being ignored.

- Caerphilly have their own procedure for investigating complaints. There are 2 levels of complaint that can be made. These are defined as:
- Those that can be resolved between your allocated worker, you and the person making the complaint.

Complaints may be made directly to the Customer Services Manager as part of the Directorate Complaints Procedure.

When a complaint is made, the childcare team and the fostering team often co-ordinate their processes. Complaints will eventually involve feedback to the person making the complaint, as well as a plan for making changes if the complaint is upheld. The Fostering Team Manager may make the decision to hold an additional Foster Carer Review following a complaint. If serious concern arises as a result of a complaint the fostering team will manage the matter through their own procedure. This may result in a decision to improve the carers skills through advice or further training, change the carer's terms of approval, or in more serious circumstances, a decision to terminate a carer's approval.

6.3 Making a complaint

If you are unhappy with any of our services or have a particular grievance, which cannot be resolved through your allocated worker or the Fostering Team Manager, a complaint may be made using the Directorates Customer Services department or by completing the complaints, comments or praise form leaflet. This leaflet will be found in the metal box you were given when you were approved. It can also be made available on request from your allocated worker.